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The
GREAT PROMISE



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The
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PROMISE

a novel by
NOEL HOUSTON



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FOR KAY

CHAPTER ONE

SAWYER heard the hall floor creak; she looked up from her book. Footsteps paused. They came on again carefully. Sawyer turned the book face down on the window ledge beside her and covered it with a half-finished square of needlepoint. She quickly took up a sewing basket from the floor on the other side of her rocker. As she began darning a stocking she looked for warmth toward the coals burning brightly in the grate across the room; then glancing past the potted plants on the windowsill out to the snow swirling down from the February sky onto the housetops of Raleigh, she pulled the shawl closer round her shoulders. The footsteps stopped outside her door. All at once the anxiety which had appeared on the girl's face was dispelled by a smile of scorn. The twist of her lips disturbed the impression first made by her youthful features: that she was a girl uncomplicated and unawakened to strong emotion. Leaning forward in the rocker, her lowered head hiding her narrowed eyes, she pretended to be in deep concentration on her sewing. The knob turned, the door was opened inward a crack, the flat of it turning toward her chair, so that she was screened. After a moment she said quietly, "Come in, Papa."

The door was pushed back. A small man, clean-shaven and neatly dressed—neater than usual, she thought; he has put on his best suit—stood irresolutely on the threshold.

He smiled timidly. "I was afraid you might be lying down sleeping, Sawyer."

"Were you?"

He cleared his throat as if annoyed that his voice was pitched so high. "I didn't want to disturb you," he said.

"As you can see, I'm doing nothing," said Sawyer. "I'm only sewing."

"You've already finished changing for dinner, haven't you?"

"Yes."

He advanced a couple of hesitant steps into the room. "You look nice. I like your pretty brown skirt." He came on across the rose-colored carpet toward her. In the delicate short fingers of his small right hand he held a pink envelope. "You have a letter. I came to bring it up to you. I thought you would want it."

"Thank you, Papa."

She took the letter from his extended hand. She saw the envelope had been ripped open. Contempt skimmed her lips and her deep gray eyes lifted briefly to flick his face. Dropping the letter into her lap, she went on with her darning, intent on the needle.

Amos Bolton stood before her uncertainly. He ran a thumb through the tuft of brown hair which sprouted from the top of his forehead and spiked rearward. He was an ugly man; his eyeballs protruded as if from the pressure of his lofty brow; below them his jaw, mouth, and chin were weak, and the pastiness of his complexion suggested a sickness.

"You don't mind I opened your letter first?"

"No."

Nervously fingering an elk's tooth on his watch chain, Bolton stared inquiringly around him.

The room was the second story of a large three-quarter turret (Bolton's study was directly underneath) anchoring the north-east corner of the big brown-shingled house. The two straight interior walls met to form an inner right-angle corner and the third wall followed the curve of the turret, so that the room, at its greatest width, was about sixteen feet across. The rough plaster was painted white, the woodwork contrastingly dark. The only window—a large bay affair—was in the centre of the curved wall. The odd shape of the high-ceilinged room gave it a peculiarly romantic air. Sawyer at times thought of it as a tower in which she was the captive damsel of a fairy tale: a hundred times, in fancy, she had escaped from it by leaping from the window to her knight's palfrey and riding away in the arms of her plumed lover.

Wardrobe closet, chest, bed, desk, bookcase packed with books, and a table lined the walls. A cane Flemish settee and the rocker were set out into the room. Almost all the furniture was massive, dark, and unlovely. The exception was the bed, toward which Bolton was drawn. Maple, its four delicately fluted and tapering posts supported a bow canopy immaculate with ruffled white organdie.

Grasping a corner post with one hand, Bolton stared down at the yellow-and-white sunburst quilt spread.

"You were right when you wanted your mother's bed in here," he said, his back to Sawyer. "I'll have to admit that now. You're so much like her, Sawyer. So much like her. Just think! She was just eighteen—less than a year older than you are now!—when we were married. You have only a glimmer of her auburn in your yellow hair, but you look much as she did—oh, she was fresh and lovely! But the blackness in her heart!" His voice rose. "Her scheming mind unfaithful as she accepted my kisses."

He turned suddenly and looked at Sawyer. Her mouth a firm line, she went on with her sewing.

He strode across to the wardrobe closet, a heavy, rearing object, pillared and carved with fruits and flowers, and flung open the doors. His eyes swiftly surveyed a long row of frocks and suits, and on the floor, tilted against a bar, a row of shoes. Most of the apparel looked new, or unworn.

"I had only the one dress and hat of hers," said Sawyer quietly. "And you took them back to the attic."

"That's not what I was thinking of," he said. "That's not why I looked in your closet. I wasn't looking to see if you'd brought them back again. Did you think I was?"

Her gray eyes regarded him steadily.

"Of course I wasn't," he insisted. "Though I'll admit I haven't got over the shock it gave me—to walk in here and find you parading like that—in her blue velvet gown—that gown!—and that hat! My heart stopped. For a moment I thought it was *she*! Whatever possessed you to dig them out of the attic, to deck yourself out in *her* clothes, striding about the room! Impersonating her—*her*—that God condemned—"

"Papa!"

The exclamation stopped him. He stared at her a moment, then his small mouth wavered in a smile.

"But we discussed that at the time, didn't we? You're not going to do anything like that again, are you? Why, Sawyer," he said, "the only reason I looked in here was to see if you need any new dresses. We'll go shopping. I'll—"

"I don't need any more clothes," she said, resuming her sewing. "I've no place to wear them."

He closed the doors with impatience. "You *are* angry with me. You're angry because I opened your letter. You don't understand. I have to protect you. You're only a child. It might have been from some man, scheming—"

"Martha McCrae's return address was on the envelope," she said evenly. "You must have—"

"But there might have *been* something," he cried. "I tell you—" He threw up his hands and his eyes searched the room frantically. They fell on a corner of the concealed book. He scowled, tiptoed to the window ledge, and thrust back the piece of needlepoint.

Sawyer's sewing hand paused.

"What is this?" he asked.

"A book."

He picked it up. "But what kind of book?"

"It's called *When Knighthood Was in Flower*. It's a—new book."

He flipped the pages. "A romance? A love story?"

"Well—"

"Sawyer! How did you sneak this into your room?"

"I didn't sneak it. I got it when we were in the bookstore. Thursday. You told me I could buy six books."

"But I didn't see this one. I *do* want you to read. But essays, histories, poetry that is decent and inspirational—not the filthy kind of novel that is

written nowadays. You deliberately deceived me!" Again, his voice rose. "Are you dedicating your life to deceiving me? What sly, cunning thoughts are in your mind—oh, not *your* thoughts, not your fault. *Hers!*"

"Oh, Papa. A romance occasionally is something to pass the time—that's all."

"That's not all. Not with you. You can't even read Scott as other people do. The audacity of it—I still can't get over it!—your daring to come into my presence with your hair done up as you imagined Leda wore hers. You were pretending to be Leda, weren't you? You admitted it! Why? I'll tell you! So you could arouse an emotion of passion in yourself! Almighty God, Sawyer!" he cried. "Won't you give me any help in trying to save you? How can we defeat the vileness, the lust, the baseness she tainted you with if you submit to it and even invite it? Tell me!"

"I've told you before, Papa," said Sawyer. "This is all such nonsense there is nothing I can say."

"Why can't you just be yourself?" he asked. She was silent, staring at the fire. "Answer me! Why can't you just be yourself?"

"Who is myself?" she muttered. "Who am I?"

"What?"

She shrugged.

He looked down at the book in his hands. "Shall we burn this?"

"As you like."

He went to the grate and tore out the pages a dozen at a time and threw them on to the coals, where they flamed and burned. The cover he dropped into a wastebasket; then he went to the bookcase.

"Now here are the books that will improve your mind. You've read them all, but they can't be re-read too much. Don't you think I showed excellent judgment in picking books to improve and keep pure a young girl's mind?"

"Except that it was Uncle Daniel who selected most of them."

"Ah yes," he said bitterly. "Give him the credit."

Uncle Daniel. Two months dead, two months that seemed to Sawyer like two centuries. And every day now, a clearer realization of how his companionship had been the best part of her life: mending her dolls when she was a child, telling exciting stories of the War Between the States, bandaging her cuts and bruises, though more often bandaging her brother Jack, who was always getting himself hurt. And as she grew older, insisting on music lessons, cultivating her appetite for reading. Poor Uncle Daniel, with his wooden leg, his paralyzed arm—he had suffered so. But oh, why had he had to die and leave her?

"You should see the places where these great books were written, and the scenes they describe, my dear," Bolton was saying. "You should see Europe."

She studied his back speculatively. Was this a new torment?

"If you don't mind, Papa," she said. "I want to finish this darning. Some other time we can—"

"Of course," he said. "I don't want to annoy you, my child." Abruptly, he crossed to the chased silver lamp on the console table behind her chair. "The light's failing. You'll hurt your eyes." He lighted the lamp and adjusted the wick precisely. "Read your letter," he said briskly, striding to the door. "Then come to dinner. Maybe," he added shyly, "I'll have some news for you. Something that will please you." Leaving the room, he closed the door.

Sawyer wrinkled her nose and stuck out her tongue after him; then she glanced at the grate where the last of the pages were blackening.

She smiled with satisfaction. So clever he thought he was. He hadn't known that she'd already finished the book and was simply re-reading those passages in which she herself, submerged in the rôle of the heroine, could find the most excitement. Or passion? he had said. Disconcerted, she stirred in her chair. The shock of the word passed and her eyes lighted with amusement. So he still thought that she imagined it was her own enchanting self the heroes valiantly fought to win. "Ods blood, you dolt of a man," she laughed aloud, "not by the width of a lean friar's thumb did you miss the mark of that."

And she was pleased to discover that, for the moment, she felt like a very successful spy puss.

She began the letter from Martha McCrae. It was crammed with chat and gossip about Washington, about Martha's joys and griefs, her little triumphs and disappointments. For a page and a half Martha reminisced on the days, a little more than a year ago, when they had been room-mates at Gridley in Virginia—those incredible days when Sawyer had discovered what it was like to be away from the brown-shingled house. Sawyer read every word of the long letter with eagerness. How much Martha said and did, how easily and with what freedom she lived.

The letter closed with an invitation to come and be Martha's guest during the Inauguration: "I know McKinley's a Republican and 'you-all' hate all Republicans, but we're going to have him another four years, looks like, and we can just ignore Mr. McKinley and have a wonderful time. You must come—say you will! Surely your father will let you. You'll just be here in the bosom of the family and you know how eminently respectable—oh how so!—Mother and the Judge are! Write and say you will! . . ."

Folding and refolding the letter, Sawyer stared out at the snow. At last she shrugged, put the letter in her sewing basket, and got up and went to the mirror. She reached back for the soft mass of hair which fell to her waist and pulled it over her shoulder. She undid the turquoise bow of

ribbon and tossed it on the dresser. Her head tilted to one side, she stroked her hair with a brush, all the while studying her features in the mirror: her curving eyebrows, darker than her hair, and her short, straight nose; the smooth line of her jaw, and her lips, redder and fuller than those of most girls her age that she had seen; her clear, thoughtful gray eyes. She was glad that her complexion was pale: it went well, she thought, with one who was subjected to solitary captivity. There was not, she concluded, a flaw in her beauty. Once, she had thought the brown spot an inch from the left corner of her mouth to be a blemish; but after she had read of the beauty spots women pasted on their cheeks in days of old she realized that her brown mark was a beauty spot, hinting that danger lurked in this woman. She caressed the spot with a forefinger, and smiled, in order to see her smile. What beautiful white teeth you have! she said silently to the reflection. She put down the brush, re-tied the silk ribbon at the end of her hair, and threw back the reddish blonde mass with a toss of her head. She pulled in her stomach and tucked her plain white shirtwaist down inside her skirt, her rounded breasts standing tight against the linen until she let out her breath. The corners of her mouth twitched with a secret amusement, and then her reflection smiled in understanding.

She went out of the room and down the stairs.

As she turned toward the dining-room at the foot of the stairs, she saw her father through the open door of his study. He was seated at his roll-top desk, wearing his ribboned glasses, and examining an open ledger. Beside him was a glass pitcher of water; he was sipping from a tumbler. Sawyer frowned. Bolton was a tobacco dealer but he did not smoke, nor did he drink alcoholic liquors. At certain times, though—when he was disturbed—he sipped ice water like a man with a vice, so it seemed to Sawyer. He did not drink it like a thirsty man, but in spaced precise sippings; it was almost, thought Sawyer with revulsion, as though he was easing by prescription a gross need, or as though he found an obscene delight in keeping his mouth and throat cooled and moistened exactly so.

Sawyer shuddered and hurried on. He was engrossed and did not look up.

In the dining-room the Negro man, Lew, an unbuttoned vest over his faded shirt, his slit brogans showing his big-toe joints, was shuffling from the kitchen with a tray of food which he and his wife had cooked. He had set the table properly—Sawyer had taught him that after much rehearsing—but she had despaired of ever persuading Lew to wear a tie and jacket while serving. To-night he had an old muffler wrapped around his throat.

The brown draperies were drawn against the cold. A small fire burning beneath the mahogany mantel at the end of the room hardly took off the chill. Sawyer lighted the candelabra on the table and the smaller pair on

the sideboard. The flames tossed wavering gleams on the urn-shaped scrolls of the browned wallpaper.

All at once Sawyer noticed that her chair—she knew it by the old scar on its carved back—had been moved from its place at the right side of the table and placed at the foot. For as long as she could remember her mother's never-dusted chair, a shattered plate before it, had stood at the foot of the table, on Amos Bolton's orders.

She was about to question Lew when her father entered. He drew out her chair for her. "Won't you sit here?" She went with an inquiring look, but he pushed the chair under her silently.

"Is everything on the table, Lew?" Bolton asked, and when the Negro bobbed his head, Bolton added, "Then you may retire."

"You don't want me to serve?" asked Lew.

"Not to-night."

Lew shuffled out.

Bolton seated himself at the head of the table, sipped from the goblet of water, bowed his head, and said grace. Sawyer peeked at him with one eye, but before she could decide anything, he said amen and began carving the mutton.

Sawyer had no appetite; she only picked at her plate. It was so strange to be seated at her mother's place. The old chair and broken plate, though intended to be a profanation, had at least given Sawyer a sense of her mother's spirit being present. Now that the chair was gone, Sawyer was completely alone with the small man beyond the wavering candles.

Sawyer did not remember ever eating at this table with her mother present. But she knew there must have been many meals with her, until on the last day Leda Sawyer Bolton had calmly cut up meat for six-year-old Jack on her one hand and then turned to wipe egg from the chin of four-year-old Sawyer on the other, all the while serenely facing her husband without a betrayal of the flight she planned to make from the house that night. *He* had said it happened that way. How many times he had told her of it! But to-night, the chair missing as well . . .

As she toyed with her fork, memories of meals she had eaten at this table crowded into Sawyer's mind. Jack, shooting up like a weed, wolfing his food across from her, then falling sullen under his father's reprimands . . . Uncle Daniel, Amos Bolton's older brother, seated beside Jack, ignoring Bolton's hardly-veiled sneers at Daniel's dependence on his charity and trying to amuse Jack and her with jests and tales. Now they were gone too: Jack fleeing from reckless trouble three years ago, to Cuba to fight in the Spanish war, dying there of yellow fever, and Uncle Daniel, two months now in his grave.

Well, at least three—her mother, and Jack, and Uncle Daniel, had escaped this house. Only she was left, and if his ever-growing tyranny

prevailed (and how could she elude it? What escape, for the thousandth time, what escape was possible for her?) the two of them existing on till he died at last—by then her youth past, indifferently she would continue eating at this table—what else?—ageing, while the arrogant house slowly died too, but more slowly than its prisoner; the end reached for her; the stubborn house alone remaining but decaying still toward a private doom.

"It's a pleasant thought, isn't it?"

Sawyer's fork clattered to the floor.

Bolton got her another from the silver chest on the sideboard, presented it to her with a little bow, and returned to his seat.

"Yes," continued Bolton, "a pleasant thought—dining opposite each other. Perhaps we should have done it sooner. I've been trying to decide for some time whether it wouldn't be better for me—for both of us—to rid our minds of the painful thought of your mother. I think it might be a good idea if we spoke no more of her." He peered at her through the arms of the candelabra. "You look relieved. It was for your good—to forewarn you of what might be your own fate if we weren't careful—that I've said so much these years, you understand? But—it's so far in the past, isn't it? She was an adulteress, she left my bed and board for a lover, taking the offspring of my loins to that whorish lair . . . ! But God struck her down in a week, my God avenged me! With the swiftness of Almighty lightning he avenged me." His shoulders relaxed and he sighed. "But there's no more need, I suppose . . . so long ago . . . thirteen years now . . . and you've grown to— But I felt you had to know, to know beyond question—I wanted you to know the truth!"

He stared at her. She saw the reflected candle flames flicker in his eyes—or were they the candles? She kept her face expressionless.

Bolton absently took his glasses from his upper coat pocket, rubbed them with his napkin and replaced them. Frowning, he hesitated like a man who has conceived a number of things to say but cannot now decide in what order to present them. Sawyer waited, his indecisiveness making her impatient with him.

"First," he said, "I'm pleased Martha McCrae has invited you to be her guest. It's time you saw a little of the world—the better side of it—and I've concluded that in the atmosphere of the McCrae household—so far as I'm able to judge—you would be confronted with a minimum of temptations. I should be happy for you to accept." Peering, he said, "I expected you to be delighted. Wouldn't you like to go?"

Sawyer shrugged. "Oh, I suppose it would be nice. If I really went."

"But I mean it!"

"Yes?"

"It happens I have business in Baltimore and will be able to accompany

you both ways on the journey. This invitation is most opportune. I've been concerned about leaving you here in my absence."

"I see," said Sawyer.

"As usual, you choose to misunderstand me—your face shows it. You think I don't trust you enough to leave you here alone. It's not a question of trusting *you*—the *better* side of you. If I wished, I could take you all the way to Baltimore with me—but I want you to enjoy the company of the McCraes. I am planning a great many pleasant things for you. For example, I meant it when I said upstairs I think you should go to Europe."

She lifted an eyebrow. "Did you?" she said politely.

He leaned back and began to speak with what he apparently thought to be jovial ease.

"There are so many places in Europe I want you to see. France, Italy—Switzerland! I can show them to you. All of them! Like when Leda and I were on our honeymoon—you're so much like her—you will enjoy the same things she did. What fun we'll have! The quaint towns, the great sights, the same hotels. Ah, you'll see! Money, who cares what it will cost? I have money still. I'm not bankrupt yet. Oh, they think they have me, some of them. They're all trying to get the best of me. But I'm on to their tricks—I'm on to 'em all. Why, what do they know? They laughed and poked fun at me at school, because I was ugly—"

He leaned forward and picked up a spoon and stared into its bright bowl, scowling at the distorted image of his misshapen face. An old habit, a self-inflicted torture, which, it seemed to Sawyer, he enjoyed.

"Ah, yes, they poked fun at me. But I bided my time. I waited my day." He tossed down the spoon. "You know, Sawyer, I was a boy of twelve when Sherman marched through the streets of Raleigh. I grew up in the Reconstruction. How the Reconstruction terrified and prostrated them, those poor, proud old snobs of ours. But not me. It was my time. I went along with 'em—the carpetbaggers and damyankees—I got as much money out of it as they did, and I kept it and I saved it and I used it. Then how I laughed at all of 'em who had laughed at me because my face was funny to them, because I was littler than they were. Littler!"

He laughed now, the gusty exhalation making the candle flames before him dance.

"Your mother was glad to have me then—her parents were! How anxious they were, how they came whining for advice and sympathy, like all the rest. Not a red cent they had—her father, you should have seen him, your grandfather. His fingers itching—and I could almost see the patch on his pants beneath his fine coat-tail. Ha! He was bankrupt, he had only one asset—his daughter, and by God—She might have married Hemmingwaihe even then, but he had no money, you see, he had no

money. She didn't marry me to get money for her parents—I deny it! I deny it! I courted her. I made her love me. But that foul Hemmingwaithe—'clean-cut' she called him, to my face!—ha!—biding his time, till he seduced her into not obeying my orders—she wouldn't learn to *mind* me!—seduced her, he did, not that it was difficult, the Jezebel, the great whore——”

“Papa!” cried Sawyer. “I’ve told you I won’t let you say things like that about her. And I mean it.” She beat the table with a fist. “I won’t!”

“You won’t?” His incredulity gave way to anger. “Oh, you won’t? You would defend her, would you? And why not? Why shouldn’t you? You’re her daughter, aren’t you? Yes, and who knows—are you *his* daughter too? Are you?” he shouted.

“Papa!” she begged. “You promised!”

“I will say it!” He gripped the edge of the table and half rose to see her better over the candles. “Who knows? Is there a single sign of resemblance to me in your features? Would anybody look at you and in any way be able to say this is Amos Bolton’s daughter? No, you’re all *her*—except sometimes the corners of your mouth are like his were—I tell you they are! If you only had Hemmingwaithe’s God-condemned brown eyes, then we might really know, mightn’t we?” He shouted: “Anyway, we can reason, can’t we? Jack was my son—anybody could look at him and know that. But after he was born—what did she and Hemmingwaithe do before you came along? Eh? How long did she lie with him before she left me altogether? Do you know? Does anybody know? Do you think they left on the spur of the moment? Isn’t it natural to suppose the liaison had taken place before then—isn’t that customary?” He wagged a forefinger at Sawyer, who sat, pale, with her shoulders drawn together. “Answer me this: why did she take only you with her? Why was Jack left behind with me? Wasn’t it because *you* were *theirs*? Their deliberate adulterine offspring? Why else would they have taken you along? Answer me!”

“I don’t know,” cried Sawyer. “I don’t know! But, please, please, be still!” She buried her face in her hands. “You know what you’re making me when you suggest that.”

“Ah yes,” said Bolton. He drew a deep breath. “I know. If it’s true. But,” he said, “we don’t really know whether it is. We’ll never know, will we?” He left his place and went around to her and put out a hand to caress her hair.

She leaned away from the touch of his hand. “This is the second time we’ve been through this.” Bitterness replaced the anguish in her voice.

“And I promised you before I wouldn’t mention it again. Forgive me. When a possibility—or what seems more than a possibility—preys on a man’s mind— But of course you’re my daughter. Else why do I love you

so? Why else would I want us to remain companions? You do want to go to Europe with me, don't you?"

"Sometimes I wonder if you hope I'm not your daughter."

"I've confused you. In my anxiety to please you—"

"If only you wouldn't keep hammering and hammering at me," said Sawyer. "You keep talking of such disgusting things!"

"Don't pretend you aren't interested in such subjects," said Bolton angrily. "How could you help it? You show it in more ways than one. For example, do you think I've forgotten how you went to your Uncle Daniel and wheedled him into giving you a full account of—" he sought a choice of phrase—"the mysteries of the sexes. And, the fool, he actually had the temerity to gratify your base curiosity. You didn't think it disgusting then, did you? I was listening outside my study door, so I know exactly what happened."

"Oh, Papa," said Sawyer. "That was so long ago. I was only thirteen. Wasn't it natural?"

"That's what your mother would say."

Sawyer leaned back helplessly. "Have you finished your dinner? Why don't you go to your room and rest? You must be tired. Let's—"

"Wouldn't you like to play the piano for me? You play so beautifully, Sawyer. Your most charming accomplishment."

"If I'm going to Martha's, there are so many things I must do."

"Of course," he agreed. He drew back her chair as she rose. "And thank you, Sawyer, for a pleasant hour," he said politely.

Leaving the dining-room, Sawyer felt a touch of remorse for disliking him so. He could be so courteous, so eager to please her, so pathetic in his little attentions. But she could by now easily dismiss any impulse to try to like him; she could no longer excuse him on the grounds that his life had been hard and mean and narrow. He had carried his curses against her mother and his accusations of an inner vileness against herself too far. She could remember a time, during childhood, when his description had made her mother seem a vile woman. The sinful desertion of her Papa had made her ache with love for him. How incredible, it seemed to her now, that that could ever have been so. For as she grew older his jealousy, his tempers, his discipline had driven her from fear to confusion to contempt. With the change in her feeling for him had risen a new conception of her mother. ("You must never despise your mother," Uncle Daniel had once told her. "Someday—") Finally, her mother was enshrined in her memory and became the archetype of all she herself wished to be: beautiful, courageous, daring, desirable, the complete woman triumphant.

As she climbed the stairs and looked over the railing and saw her father re-entering his study, her lip curled. If only he knew how every

night she and her mother were together—the lovely face summoned and appearing in the darkness above her bed, the communion, and finally the going to sleep serene in a knowledge of benevolent protection.

Of the flight with her mother and John Hemmingwaithe she had for a long time remembered nothing. By repeated thinking of it, by trying to recall some glimpse of it, she had brought up one scene which she reflected on often: the room in the Charleston rooming house, her mother lying in bed, stricken with pneumonia, her beautiful auburn hair framing her white face, her eyes closed, the pudgy doctor sitting anxiously beside the bed, she playing on the floor, and John Hemmingwaithe, tall and brown-eyed (how grave were his brown eyes gazing down on her mother as he stood behind the doctor's chair, rumpling his hair with his long fingers, plucking at his neat, short moustache). Sawyer was aware that this might not be an actual memory. She made up so many stories about herself, for one thing. For another, as Sawyer herself approached her present age of seventeen, and realized that since her mother had been only twenty-five when she died and therefore really still young, the white face in the bed had become younger. Yet, from the beginning Hemmingwaithe had been seen as a young man—so possibly it was a true memory. She only knew it was like a photograph, all the people motionless, she outside herself, seeing herself posed at play on the floor. It was one of her most cherished tableaux . . .

Reaching her room, she went to the wardrobe closet and began going through the garments in an aura of camphor moth balls and sachet powder. Everything she owned was so little-girlish! Martha, at eighteen, would be so grown up. Thank heaven Martha at least thought her to be eighteen, too. Their first night as room-mates at Gridley, when Martha had told her age, Sawyer had advanced her own age a year. She *couldn't* let Martha know she was a whole year younger. Seventeen would seem especially little-girlish to Martha now.

There was so much to be decided: which dresses should she take, how much could she get into a trunk, would it be cold in Washington in March, would Martha think her new dark blue basque suit tacky, what should she wear on the train, how should she word her letter of acceptance?

As she chewed on a pen staff at the writing desk, labouring over the note, her gray eyes narrowed to focus the dazzling scene rising in her mind. The White House. Yes. The Reception . . .

And then the President, looking beyond all the beautiful people eagerly clustered around him, speaks in a deep, warm voice: "But who is that bewitching young lady over there, that stunning creature with the glorious yellow hair touched with red?" "Oh, that, Mr. President, is Sawyer

Bolton, the toast of America and Europe." And the President's eyes brighten and he speaks: "Ascertain if she will grant me the pleasure of her acquaintance, and if so, bring her to me at once." And escorted by two lackeys in golden breeches, she saunters across the floor toward the President while all the gentlemen look on in admiration and the ladies in envy . . .

And a voice loudly: "That is Sawyer Bolton, illegitimate daughter of the notorious adulteress Leda Bolton. Shun her!" And the people avert their eyes, the President is turning his back—a harsh hand on her shoulder: "You must leave, only respectable people accepted here . . ."

No, no! Not that way—

. . . saunters across the floor toward the President, as all look on in admiration and envy. Languidly she extends her hand, and the President takes it and bows over it, his lips brushing her glove; straightening, he whispers, "I must see you again. I am your slave . . ."

There was a crash of glass below Sawyer's room . . . the scene vanished.

Sawyer sat rigid. Hadn't she been hearing his hard heels striking the floor as he paced his study, and then the squeak of his swivel chair as he sat in it? Just now he must have swept the tray, pitcher, and tumbler from his desk in one angry motion.

Hastily she finished the note, addressed an envelope, and thrust the sheet into it. As she raised the flap to her tongue, she heard his footsteps on the stairs. They turned down the hall toward her room and stopped outside her door.

She waited.

"Sawyer?"

"I'm in bed. I'm about to go to sleep," she said impatiently.

"Very well."

The footsteps receded. She heard a door open. The door was closed.

She sealed the envelope, laid it in the centre of the desk, and began undressing. As she took off her clothes, she lighted and turned low a lamp by her bed and blew out the lamp on the console table. She put on her flannel nightgown and snuggled into bed. She reached out to the night table for her Bible and read three chapters picked at random—a habit Uncle Daniel had set for her in childhood—then she blew out the lamp. Her eyes becoming accustomed to the darkness, she discovered that the moon was shining on the white rooftops outside her window. The sky had cleared. She lay on her back and pulled the quilts to her chin.

Staring up into the darkness, she conjured gradually the image of her mother looking down, wearing a soft white robe and smiling tenderly.

"Mother I love," Sawyer began, her lips moving silently, and then she at once thanked her mother for the journey and visit she had arranged. "I am so grateful to you, Mother. Show me by signs just what you want

me to do, as always. Let me be generous and honest and brave as you were. And oh, Mother, to-night again he said he wasn't my father. I don't care if he isn't. Maybe I hope he isn't. Was John Hemmingwaithe my father? Was it what you wanted? If it was, I am content, for I was born of your love, of yours and his, and not of hate, and I feel beautiful. But oh, Mother, it frightens me. I would die if anyone knew. It makes me feel different—not as good as other people. I mean, because they would think I'm not. I know I shouldn't feel that way, but if I am—you know what they would call me—if I am that, *they* would say I am bad. And sometimes I think I am, and I get a good feeling from thinking I am bad. But if I am that, don't ever let anybody know. Please. Don't let the McCraes think I'm not a good person. Oh, I'm so afraid they will think so. Should I go, Mother? Should I really go? You're smiling so beautifully to-night."

The image faded. Sawyer turned on her left side and closed her eyes. Suddenly she struck the bedding with a fist, and then struck again and again. "You must get out of here," said a voice inside her brain, and she was not sure if it was her own voice. "There will be a way...some way... you must . . ." She opened her eyes and stared out at the moonstruck housetops till her eyelids at last dropped from drowsiness.

CHAPTER TWO

SAWYER stood far back in the multitude thronging the East Plaza of the Capitol. Rain dashed in gusts across the Plaza, but Sawyer, sure that this was the most wonderful day in her life, thought the rain frolicsome.

She was with Martha McCrae and a tall young man in his late twenties named Allen Dunbar, who stood between the girls with outstretched arms and held an umbrella over each of them. Both the rain and water running off the umbrellas were drenching his black felt hat and heather topcoat, but no sign of discomfort showed in his face.

Sawyer's eyes had been darting happily around the Inaugural scene with that intermittent absence of focus which may mask a turbulence of inner thought. Now, for a moment, she wondered if she shouldn't offer to hold her own umbrella. Mr. Dunbar not only would be able to get out of the wet under Martha's, but he would be closer to Martha, and Sawyer was sure that would please her.

Sawyer sensed that there might be a slight "three makes a crowd" kind of annoyance in Martha's thoughts. Martha's invitation hadn't been a mere gesture of cordiality in a casual letter which she hadn't dreamed would be accepted—she shouldn't torture herself with such speculation. It was just that since Judge McCrae brought Allen Dunbar home the afternoon before, with the announcement that Dunbar had unexpectedly come in from Philadelphia, Martha had so concentrated on entertaining *him* that Sawyer couldn't help feeling a little, well, neglected. "Allen's so *different* from the way he was when I last saw him, before the Spanish war," Martha had confided breathlessly when she came to Sawyer's room the previous evening to tell her good night. "Oh Sawyer, you don't know . . . I can't tell you how I *felt* about Allen the moment I saw him this time. I suppose it was there all along and I didn't know it."

There was no question in Sawyer's mind that Martha would have preferred to spend the afternoon with Mr. Dunbar on a secluded sofa to attending the ceremony. "All rain and gloom and dull speeches," Martha had said petulantly before they set out. But when Sawyer quickly suggested that they not attend, Martha had protested: "Oh, I wouldn't *think* of letting you miss it, dear. It's one of the sights you came to see. Possibly Allen will enjoy it too."

Sawyer wasn't sure which Mr. Dunbar would have preferred. He seemed such a distant kind of person. But she was grateful to him for appraising her as the belle of a dreamy antebellum plantation; his heartening misconception had been reported to her just as the last of her self-confidence was about to be extinguished by the splendour of her

surroundings in the McCrae mansion. She had been happy as long as Martha made a fuss over her coming, but when Martha's attention was switched mainly to Dunbar, Sawyer very soon began wondering what she, a girl with such a "dubious background"—as she phrased it to herself—was doing in the bosom of a family utterly secure in its wealth and respectability. She guiltily suspected that Judge and Mrs. McCrae had sized her up for what she was: common and shoddy. In this miserable mood of wishing she hadn't come, Sawyer was sitting alone in the library, turning through some essays by Montaigne which she had happened to pick up from a table, when Martha found her.

"Allen and I were walking through the conservatory a moment ago," laughed Martha, "and he was asking me about you and I told him about our grand days at school and how I thought you were the most beautiful girl I'd ever known—"

"Oh now, Martha—"

"And he said," Martha continued, "that he supposed you *would* have to be called lovely, and that everyone who admires the Gibson Girl kind of straight-shouldered perfection would doubtless say you were. Though personally, he said, *he* preferred a darker, somewhat shorter type, and of course I'm dark and shorter than you are. But he was just being polite and I didn't pay attention to a word of *that*! And when I told him you were up from the South, he said he could see you drifting serenely through the camelias while your father and the neighbouring colonels sat on the columnated porch stroking their goatees and sipping mint juleps!"

Sawyer envisioned the scene instantly. She was in pink crinoline—hoopskirts—strolling the garden path—and she reached for a yellow rose and inhaled its fragrance delicately . . .

Martha giggled. "Isn't Allen silly? Of course, you don't live like *that*!"

"Why yes," said Sawyer, "pretty much so. How did you think we lived?"

"Oh—I didn't mean it that way," said Martha. "But what I was going to say was, Allen suddenly said maybe he wasn't altogether right about your being so serene, because he had noticed in your face a hint of—well, at first he thought it was a hint of sadness, but it could have been a kind of restlessness—or something. I laughed at him and he said, oh well, it might have been an illusion of countenance rather than a translucent glimmer from some exigent emotion within. *Those* were his very words!" Martha laughed again—a funny kind of laugh for Martha, thought Sawyer—and said, "I'll bet you didn't even know Allen had noticed you that much."

"No, I didn't," said Sawyer.

"Nor did I," said Martha.

Mr. Dunbar's flattering analysis had so buoyed Sawyer's self-esteem

that even now, standing in the rain in the Plaza, she felt a little condescending toward Martha, who was in such a fret over the water-soaked brush binding of her skirt. If she had only held her skirt up out of the water, as Sawyer herself was doing so gracefully with her left hand, it wouldn't have got wet. Martha, Sawyer saw clearly, lacked the poise a Southern girl had to minimise an uncomfortable situation. For example, it would never occur to Martha to offer to hold her own umbrella.

"Mr. Dunbar," said Sawyer, "if you will give me my umbrella, then you—"

"Thank you, Miss Bolton," said Dunbar, "but I'm happy to hold it for you."

A rising cheer caused Sawyer to look to the wooden platform erected over the steps of the centre portico of the Capitol. President William McKinley was just stepping out on the platform to receive the oath of office for his second term. The air was shaken as six warships anchored in the Potomac fired salvos in honour of the President who was doomed to be mortally wounded within the year by an assassin's two pistol shots. Senator Mark Hanna, on hand as usual to shield the President from adversity, raised an umbrella and held it low over McKinley's head. At that, the cinematographers, who were a novelty to the crowd, added Mark Hanna to their curses against the gray day; but, cap visors reversed, they continued cranking away on their boxlike cameras from a canvas-covered platform to one side. The President shook hands with his beaming new Vice-President, Theodore Roosevelt, and turned to the Chief Justice to take the oath.

Though Sawyer could not identify all the different statesmen, the platform was a setting for actors in striped trousers and black coats and the playlet they performed was imposing and grand.

"What do you suppose the President will say, Allen?" asked Martha.

Had she waited another moment she could have found out from the President himself. He had taken his stance at the front of the platform and was waiting only for the applause to cease before opening his mouth to commence. But the purpose of her question was to flatter Allen by acknowledging his grasp of political affairs.

"Oh, about what a mighty nation we are, now that we've whipped Spain," said Allen, with the nonchalance of a lawyer familiar with the requisites of oratory, and, smiling at Sawyer, he continued: "The dinner pail's full, we stand confident just inside the door of the twentieth century, Cuba and the—" was that a slight cynical twist of his lips? wondered Sawyer—"and the Philippines are a solemn trust."

Since these were the subjects the people had come expecting to hear about, the President began to speak of them.

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Her eyes lifted to the Capitol's misty dome. Atop it stood the female Statue of Freedom. Except that its robes were bronze, the statue was much like Sawyer imagined her mother to be when she looked down on her. It pleased her to think that possibly the statue was her mother, come in this guise to share in a day rare in her daughter's life.

A rare day in her life. She must take in every one of its sights and sounds, so that she could recall them again and again during the months and years to come. Her glance went to the President's own Troop A, the cavalymen astride black chargers before the platform, her eyes roved the array of cannon guarded by blue-uniformed artillerymen everywhere—swords and guns challenging any sly evil thing to enter this company of mighty men and women—and then she returned to the President himself in the full swing of his sonorous address.

"Why, Sawyer!" said Martha through the portiere of rain separating them. "I believe you're actually trembling."

"What? Oh, I expect I am. I never saw anything so wonderful."

An exulting *aliveness* was what she felt—for the first time in her life, it seemed now. Here was she, Sawyer Bolton, standing at the fountain-head of the nation. As her heart beat faster, she conceived that the hearts of the people around her beat faster too. In this place even clocks and watches might tick faster, the hands moving at a heightened pace around their dials. So exquisitely keyed was she that in shifting her position she felt the stir of her undergarments brush against her skin.

The forbidding brown-shingled house lay far distant. She had escaped it for a while—for a precious while. A rare day? Surely more than that. The one day, the day that had waited for her, the day for which she had existed. Her gray eyes searched upward, appealingly, to the Capitol dome. There must be signs and portents in the air, in the scudding clouds, in the splash of raindrops, in the breeze on her cheek . . .

There were explosions in the street beyond the Plaza. Startled, Sawyer laid fingertips against her lips. A horseless carriage, a thoughtless motorist, said Allen. So it was. Mounted police galloped in the direction of the noise. Sawyer craned to see over the umbrellas to her right. The explosions of the engine stopped. Sawyer envisioned the chagrined carriage operator, slumped behind the driving bar, pouting upward into the faces of the police horses glaring down at him. She laughed, the emotion which found a brief escape from her throat pitching her laughter high . . .

It was not until a moment or two after the figure began to rise that she vaguely realized whence it must have come. At first there was only the prone figure lying at her feet, then, as he struggled up, his face dripping from the water in the shallow depression, she had an unsure recollection of a disturbance of the canopy of umbrellas off to her left a second before,

a disturbance approaching her, like a narrow gust of wind, and then the figure emerging and slipping face downward in the shallow puddle. That was the way it had seemed. Yet, hadn't she been looking the other way, toward the sound of the vehicle? She was not sure she had not just looked down and he was there, already beginning to push himself up with his hands, lifting his head, blinded and blinking.

He hastily wiped his eyes and face with a handkerchief which he whipped from his topcoat pocket, and started to hurry on. His eyes fell on Sawyer's startled face, and he stopped. They stood thus, he staring into her gray eyes, she looking into his brown eyes.

Somewhere beyond the Capitol a military bandsman tentatively blew an ascending trill on his clarinet to make sure it had not been stopped by rain. The piping notes swirled over them and Sawyer averted her eyes.

She could be sure this time of the disturbance among the umbrellas off to the left. They tossed like Alice-in-Wonderland toadstools. The young man, with only a disinterested glance in that direction, lifted her umbrella from Dunbar's hand and stepped under it beside her.

"Do you mind?" he asked. Sawyer looked quickly to Martha and Dunbar; they were frowning. "I'm about as wet as I'd like to get," the man explained cheerfully.

His face still wasn't quite clean and he seemed to know it, for he wiped it again with his handkerchief. At the same time, a helmeted policeman and a panting fat man emerged from the fluctuating umbrellas. They shouldered past them, dodging the dozens of rib-ends as they squirmed out of sight.

"They're liable to get an eye poked out," the young man said to Sawyer. "Aren't they?" He straightened his derby and shrugged his shoulders to settle his topcoat.

". . . and John Hemmingway's eye were brown," whispered a voice in Sawyer's mind. Her glance shot upward but the young man was holding the umbrella forward, blocking from her view the statue on the Capitol dome.

In the next moment the President concluded his speech and bowed in response to the welling applause. The rain, as if on cue, stopped abruptly. The undulant panoply of green and black silk which had covered the multitude disappeared as twenty or thirty thousand umbrellas were folded; and the President, from his elevation, for the first time saw the forty thousand people he had been addressing.

The crowd began a slow wheeling movement around the Capitol in order to watch the Inaugural Procession down Pennsylvania Avenue.

"Come, Sawyer," said Martha sharply, "we must be going." Her tone made it plain she intended the man be left where he stood.

The stranger folded Sawyer's umbrella and tucked it under an arm.

"I'd better carry your shower stick a little way," he laughed. "This drizzle-drozzle might start up again any minute."

Sawyer knew she should protest, but she could not think of the right words, and the solid push of the crowd began moving them off together.

Allen said to the young man, "Do you know who that policeman was after?"

"Somebody who duped the fat man out of his money," said the young man, over his shoulder. "I was helping chase him when I fell down."

Sawyer marked the lean hand holding her umbrella handle. She wondered what would have happened if his hand had reached the crook's collar.

"I see," said Allen. "May I ask who you are?" The young man apparently did not hear, and Allen repeated the question.

"Oh. My name's Anthony Tyndall." To Sawyer he added with a smile, "I'm generally called Tony." Over his shoulder, he said, "You don't have to worry about me, sir. I'm just a Congressman's humble secretary. Poor but honest. Congressman Fischer of the Newark district, he's my boss." He stopped and gestured toward the portico, where several hundred members of the government had risen from their seats and were re-entering the Capitol. "You can see him up there." And when he stopped, Allen and Martha were pushed on ahead.

"And your name," he said to Sawyer, "is Mary."

"No," replied Sawyer.

"You look like a girl who might be named Mary."

"But it's Sawyer."

"Smith?"

"Bolton."

"Sawyer Bolton. Lovely. Now we know each other."

She bit her lip for having fallen into the little trap, but she didn't altogether mind his knowing her name. Oh, that wasn't so—she did mind. He was a complete stranger. "But he *is* attractive," whispered a voice, "and —" "No!" said a stern voice, and she recognised *that* one as her own.

"Wouldn't you know it?" said Tyndall. "My shoelace!"

He knelt to retie it. Since he still had her umbrella, Sawyer could think of no choice but to wait beside him, the crowd clumsily parting to pass by on either side of them as though they were an islet.

"Why, where did your friends go?"

He had straightened. He stood on tiptoe to look over the heads of the crowd.

Sawyer couldn't see over anybody's head. These people had suddenly become giants. "Martha," she called out. "Martha!" But the shuffling crowd trampled the word. "They went this way," she said, and tried to push against the crowd.

"No," said Tyndall, taking her arm. "I think I had a glimpse of them this way."

He led her in the direction he chose. Since it was partly with the current, they eventually made their way to a point beyond the Capitol where the crowd had begun to divide and scatter.

Still there was no sign of Martha, who, Sawyer knew, must be anxiously searching for her.

All the joyous excitement vanished. The warm gray clouds had become lowering, the noises of the city sullen and threatening. If her father learned . . .

"There's nothing to worry about," she heard Tyndall saying. "You know where you live, don't you?"

"I don't live in Washington. I'm only visiting. I've never been in Washington before."

"Oh well, I'll get you a cab, you tell the driver the address—you know that, don't you—"

"Yes . . ."

"—and he'll have you home and safe and sound in no time. There's nothing to it."

He said it so cheerfully, he made it look simple. After all, he belonged to the government, and a government official might be expected to take in his stride the task of helping a lost girl find her way home. The clouds seemed to lighten and she realized that somewhere a band—several bands were playing courageous martial airs. Her father? Why, he was in Baltimore. This little misadventure, it was something he need never know about.

"Now let's see you smile."

She smiled, and it was the first time he had seen her smile. He swallowed and fumbled the umbrella.

"Turn it off," he gasped. "It's putting my eyes out."

She had to laugh at that. Together they swung along toward Pennsylvania Avenue, she gracefully holding up her flaring skirt to keep it out of the puddles. She breathed deeply of the pleasant air. She wondered that she had not noticed before that the gaunt trees were swelling with buds and that a flock of pigeons swooped and turned overhead, seeking a pavement clear enough of people to land on.

When they reached the avenue, the Procession already was passing. The President's carriage was receding in the distance, and West Point Cadets marching by in extended formation were being cheered.

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid you can't start home till the parade is over," said Tyndall. He indicated a number of empty hansoms and four-wheelers waiting at the head of a nearby cross street. "When they can move, I'll put you into one. Wouldn't you like to take a look at the parade?"

He pushed a way to the front, oblivious to the frowns of those they jostled, to whom Sawyer felt obliged to offer a smile of apology.

Units of the Regular Army were now marching past, the valorous men who had put Spain in her place. The infantry, their battle flags heavy with the rain that had soaked them, stepped lively to the crash of their brass bands. The hoofs of the cavalry set up a clatter, the more spirited animals side-stepping and occasionally flinging their forelegs. The field pieces rumbled menacingly, the horses drawing them noble in their heavy harness, the cannoneers sitting erect with arms crossed on the rattling caissons.

Sawyer clapped also when a body of young troopers whose flag identified them as the Lee Rifles of Charlotte came swinging down the avenue.

Tyndall smiled. "Your home's North Carolina."

"That's right. Not Charlotte, though. Raleigh."

"So that's how you happen to have that beautiful drawl."

"I don't drawl!"

"I'm crazy about it."

A drizzle began falling. Umbrellas mushroomed along each side of the street. Tyndall struggled with Sawyer's, while she dismally wondered if the violet ribbons on her hat were colour fast. She wasn't even sure of the blue suit, though it had cost enough. Miserably watching him, she turned up her coat collar and put her gloved hands under her arms.

"It won't raise," said Tyndall. "But there's a nice little oyster house on that side street where the carriages are. Why not—"

"No, no!"

Just then the heavens loosed a downpour that would have drowned all thought of decorum in the late Queen Victoria herself had she been standing there in it. Tyndall grinned in triumph. Sawyer impulsively wrinkled her nose at him.

As they ran into the restaurant, Sawyer had a glimpse in the window of stacks of oysters, of silvery fish lying inert on cracked ice, and of lobsters clawing feebly at the pane. Once inside, she was vaguely aware only of shifting lights and shadows, of a confusion of sounds, and of a warm steamy aroma. By the time she had regained possession of her thoughts, and something of her breath, she was seated at a small table opposite Mr. Tyndall, at one side of the room, and a waiter was hanging their coats on a clothes tree near a potted palm.

Tyndall waved away the menu. "A bottle of Chablis and a tureen of oyster stew with cream."

The waiter bowed and went away before she could speak.

This would not do! thought Sawyer. She could not take a meal with a strange man. And he had ordered wine! She had just meant to come inside out of the rain to wait. Should she get up and leave? Out into

that downpour? She might go and wait by the door. But how awkward! Suddenly she recalled a scene in a romance where a man had tried to seduce a young woman with wine. She tried to remember how the woman had escaped, but she couldn't think how it had come out.

Anyway, to be sensible, Mr. Tyndall had not behaved objectionably. There was nothing of the oily villain about him. He *was* rather impetuous and informal, and his brown eyelashes were awfully long, and his nose might have once been broken at the bridge, but none of these things made him sinister, or even impaired his—well, his attractiveness. He had been courteous, he had tried to get her a cab, and now he had got her out of the rain. What else could he have done? She didn't know. She was sure Martha wouldn't approve of this, though; and Martha would have known exactly what to do.

She looked around the room. The blur of movement which was all she had seen on entering the place slowly came into focus and she became aware of the palms in tubs, the walls painted to represent a bay with little boats sailing on the wavelets, the white-aproned waiters moving among the tables with steaming dishes, and of the individual diners, the murmur of their conversation driven to a higher pitch by the furious rain slashing against the windows. They were nice-looking people, and there were quite a lot of them, all around. Her shoulder muscles, which had tightened against the rain as she ran, relaxed. Pulling off her gloves, she stirred into a comfortable position in the chair.

She became conscious that Mr. Tyndall, his lean fingers interlocked under his chin, had been gazing steadily at her all this time. She flushed and lowered her eyes.

The waiter brought the wine, poured their glasses half full, replaced the bottle in the ice bucket, and went away.

"I was staring at you so," he said, lifting his glass and inhaling the bouquet, "because I was holding an election with myself."

"An election?"

"I was taking votes to decide which of the lovely things about you affects me most."

It had started already then. The making love to her. Her reading should have led her to expect this.

"But the polls were swamped. There'll have to be a recount."

"Don't, Mr. Tyndall, please."

To cover her confusion she lifted her glass and sipped the pale wine. It was cold and flinty in her mouth. Hastily, she put the glass on the table; she hadn't meant to drink. She had to swallow, though; as the sip went down sunlight diffused within her.

"Won't you call me Tony?" he asked.

"I can't do that."

"I wish you would let me call you Sawyer. The name gets me. I like saying it. And it seems we've already known each other forever."

"Oh, now."

She felt stupid. Of course he was fresh, but—oh, fresh was such a schoolgirlish word, like saying somebody was conceited. What he really was, perhaps, if she were only experienced enough to recognise it, was clever and sophisticated. He could talk lightly and entertainingly even with someone he had just met, while she was utterly gauche. If only she could think of a neatly turned phrase that would let him see she wasn't a complete imbecile. Of course, his opinion was of very little importance, but nobody liked to be thought a clod. By this time to-morrow, she suspected, she would be reeling off a string of dazzling utterances she might have said to match his wit.

His sombre eyes were resting on her hair. Martha herself had put it up for her, and Sawyer knew it was surging in soft waves beneath her high-perched violet hat.

"What colour do you call your hair?"

"You may say it's yellow," she replied as briskly as she could.

He shook his head. "No, not yellow. A little darker than yellow. With just a touch of red. Like honey. That's what it is, the colour of honey."

She turned warm and looked out across the room. What *could* one say in response to statements so flippant and personal?

"Now you tell me what you like about me," he grinned.

"I've no intention of doing any such thing." She had not meant to be quite so severe. "I would like it best if—" She saw that his lean fingers were toying with an object which he had absently taken from a pocket. It offered a change of subject at least. "What is that?" she asked.

"This?" He was surprised to find he had it in his hands. "Oh, just a padlock." He handed it to her. "Open it."

"But it's locked. If I had the key—"

"Anybody could open a padlock with a key. Open it without."

She pulled on the hasp but it held fast.

"Want to bet I can't open it?" he asked.

"Without a key?"

"Sure." He took the padlock and easily lifted the hasp with two fingers. His expression of pleased surprise made her smile. "See? Good thing you didn't bet me a hundred dollars I couldn't do it." He slipped it back into his pocket and added as an afterthought, "It's just a parlour trick."

The waiter brought the tureen and two white bowls. Tyndall dipped out the stew, plump with oysters lifted that morning from Chesapeake Bay, and the waiter put one steaming bowl before her.

She couldn't very well say, "Take it away, I don't want it." After all, it was simply oyster stew. Everybody else in the restaurant was eating

and—well, she *was* hungry. Perhaps Martha wouldn't do it, but Martha could be silly sometimes about things, anyway. If her father could see her now, he . . . She glanced at the streaming window. No one was peering in. But, "Yes, just like your mother was, aren't you?" he seemed to whisper furiously. She squared her shoulders. Suppose she was? The carriages in the street showed no signs of moving, she could hear bands in the distance, it probably would still be some time before the Procession had passed. She hadn't arranged this, it was all quite by accident, and she could see no harm if, for once in her life . . . She picked up a spoon. She took a mouthful, then another. It was delicious.

"I hope you won't think I've been fresh, the way I've talked."

She nearly choked on a swallow. She had almost forgotten he was there. "What? Oh."

"It's just that I never saw anybody who— Well, I'm a pretty good talker usually, but you make me kind of tongue-tied— I don't know *what* to say to you. It's easy to see you're a lady of position."

"A what?"

"Upper crust. High society. It's written all over you in diamond letters."

"Indeed, Mr. Tyndall."

"I won't be happy till you call me Tony. But you see, that's what I mean. There's no reason why you *should* call me Tony, and *you* know you should call me Mr. Tyndall, and you know it's not quite proper to be here with me. I don't care, you see, this is swell for me, but you, and the people you were with, well, you're—well, I'm—"

He stopped, clearly not able to think of words to express himself. She liked the sincerity of his confusion, his sudden shyness. She had misread him—or, at any rate, even if he *was* a dashing man of the world, her beauty had abashed him—he had admitted it. Why, *he* was the one who was ill-at-ease in *her* presence. The sincerity of his brown eyes . . . John Hemmingwaihe standing behind a chair, his brown eyes gazing down at at her mother's white face . . . Mr. Tyndall didn't have a small moustache, the way John Hemmingwaihe had, but—

"Do you mind if I ask who your friends were?" he asked.

"Not at all," said Sawyer. She casually lifted her wineglass, sipped, and set the glass down gracefully. "They were Miss McCrae, with whom I'm staying, and Mr. Dunbar, a prominent attorney."

"Miss McCrae. That's not the Judge Henry McCrae family, is it?"

"Yes. Do you know him? He's in the government, too."

"Oh, he's way up there in the administration. I've heard of him, but I don't have many millionaire pals. Say, the McCraes will be going to the Inaugural Ball to-night, won't they?"

"I think so."

"Wonderful! I'll see you there."

"I'm afraid not."

"Oh sure, you've got to be there."

"Why?"

"Because I'll be. I've got a friend who got me a—that is, you've got to be there."

"I won't be there, Mr. Tyndall. I'm sorry."

He leaned across the table toward her. "Are you really?"

She blushed. "That was only an expression."

"Hello!" said a voice warmly. "I was just leaving when I saw you."

A large, solid-looking man had come up beside their table. He carried a black Homburg in one hand and a bearskin overcoat was thrown over the other arm. His massive head, black-and-silver hair in tight waves, was distinguished.

Tyndall got to his feet instantly. "Why, hello, Mr. Foster. Going out in the rain?"

Foster indicated his fur coat. "Ol' Bruin's pretty warm for to-day but he'll keep me dry." His eyes cut to Sawyer.

She caught her breath. They were devastating eyes: green, flecked with black specks. No man had ever looked at her like that. After the first instant of shock, though, she decided that their knifing was unwitting; they were simply intensely honest eyes.

"May I present my good friend, Mr. Foster, Miss Bolton?" said Tyndall. Foster bowed formally.

"Miss Bolton," Tyndall burst out, "is going to be my wife!"

Sawyer's mouth dropped. She stared at him.

Foster's eyes flashed from one of them to the other. He laughed genially. "Congratulations, Tony. You're not getting much of a husband, young lady, but he's certainly found a beautiful, beautiful wife."

He bowed again and strode to the door, putting on his hat and great-coat as he went.

Tony sat down sheepishly. Sawyer glared at him.

"Well," he said, "I didn't mean to come out with that. But Mr. Foster's my best friend, and I wanted him to know it first."

"I never—"

"But it's the truth. You'll see. It's got to be."

The desperation in his voice was not unflattering, but—Sawyer shook her head impatiently. She took a deep breath and delivered evenly four or five sentences she had carefully composed.

"Mr. Tyndall, you've been kind and considerate. It's been pleasant being with you. And I thank you for everything. But this must be all that there is to it. I cannot see you again."

He grinned. "A charming bread-and-butter speech. But," he frowned, "it won't do." He reached across and put a hand on hers. She was grateful

he did not try to hold it when she withdrew it.

"Look, Sawyer, I've tried to speak your kind of language and I haven't got myself across. Now I'm going to quit trying to put on and talk natural. What people say is true."

"About what?"

"This thing of love right off the bat. No, wait a minute." He held up a hand. "Don't say 'Mr. Tyndall!' This is the McCoy. It's got me bad. Gentleman Jim had the words for it—"

"Who?"

"Right to the solar plexus."

She had no idea where the solar plexus was. She glanced out the window. Spectators leaving the parade were passing, leaning into the rain. The cabs were shifting for position and people were getting into them. She rose hastily.

Tyndall beckoned the waiter, at the same time pulling a wad of crumpled bills from a side coat pocket—a curious way to carry money, Sawyer thought—and paid the check.

After he had helped her with her coat, she turned to him and said suddenly, "Did you ever have a moustache?"

"Why, no. But I'll start one to-morrow if you like."

Bewildered by her own astonishing question, she started blindly for the door. He followed, raising the umbrella as they went out and holding it over her as they ran into the street.

He pushed away a gentleman who was about to enter the last empty four-wheeler. "Engaged!" he shouted to the indignant gentleman, and helped her inside.

Through the rain-shimmered window she could see him walking beside the carriage, hat in hand, his head bared to the downpour.

"Remember," he called, "I'll see you at the Ball to-night."

Laughing, now that she was safe, she shook her head. The pair broke into a trot and Tyndall was left behind. After a moment Sawyer looked through the rear window, but he had vanished into the crowd.

CHAPTER THREE

SAWYER dipped a tentative toe into the massive china tub which stood on four iron balls clutched by lion claws. Reassured, she slipped off her mauvette dressing gown and sank gratefully into the hot water.

For this guest bathroom, Judge McCrae, a devoted student of Roman lives, had wanted a sunken marble tub. Mrs. McCrae had protested that such a depravity would shock her guests. She had favoured an old-fashioned rectangular boxlike type, copper-lined, but even the architect had rebelled against that. The massive china affair was the result of a compromise that had left all three parties dissatisfied.

Of this domestic history Sawyer knew nothing. Nevertheless, the thoughts which clamoured for recognition in her mind might have been more suitable in the sunken Roman bath. At any rate they would have been considered a departure from thoughts a proper young lady should have while bathing. She struggled against them a little, for propriety's sake. But, "I have *always* behaved properly," she insisted in self-justification, "though perhaps," with a shadow of a smile at the corners of her mouth, "because I've never had an opportunity to do otherwise."

And so, her hair wrapped in a towel, lying back and sponging herself soapily, she began to indulge herself with reflections on the encounter with Anthony Tyndall. She retraced it step by step, daring herself to recall the most minute details: seeing again his bewildered, muddy face; feeling again the shock as he ducked under the umbrella; the pigeons, the parade, the lobsters clawing at the pane; dwelling on his absurd talk of love; and hurrying past, then returning to it again: the memory of the *touch* of his hand on hers. And she didn't have to make up any of it; it had all actually happened!

The explanation she had given the McCraes without really telling them anything had been adroit, she thought. Martha and Mr. Dunbar, after failing to find her, had returned to the McCrae mansion in the hope that she had preceded them. Still buoyed by her adventure, Sawyer, once she had discovered there was no hint of censure in the McCraes' manner, had pooh-poohed away the family's anxiety with a wave of her hand. Mr. Tyndall had put her in a cab, she told them, and though it was delayed several times by traffic, it had brought her straight home at last. An impulse to tell Martha the whole truth, when they were alone later, she rejected. In the first place, keeping it her own secret made it all the more precious. Besides, Martha could never understand the succession of mishaps, each trivial in itself, which had driven her and Mr. Tyndall inevitably into the restaurant. The mischance of his not being able to raise

the umbrella, for instance . . .

She sat upright in the tub, the soapsuds swirling about her waist. She remembered suddenly that when they came out of the restaurant he had opened the umbrella without trouble and held it over her as they ran for the carriage. It must not have been really stuck, then. His shoelace! Had it really been untied? She ought to have frowned, but—

She smiled.

Was there really, she wondered, such a person as Anthony Tyndall? She remembered how he had vanished; it *might* be he no longer existed.

But that was silly, of course. Somewhere in Washington, he was alive and real. Was she still with him, in his thoughts? She tried to imagine him, eating lonesomely at a boarding-house table at this moment. Or taking a solitary walk through the dusk in the park, thinking of her. Or working overtime at his desk in the Capitol, to make up for time lost while with her.

Tyndall shut the door behind him and looked around the square room at the seated men. Their faces were wanly lighted by the gas mantles. Dusk hovered outside the hotel-room windows.

"Greetings," said Foster. He waved genially from an easy chair. "And gentlemen, salute the bridegroom-to-be."

The dozen or so men responded variously from their seats on the sofa, on the quilted bed, and on four or five chairs placed about the room.

These men were tall, short, thin, fat. A couple held hats in laps, others had pushed their hats back or had left them sitting squarely on their heads. None of them was badly dressed; the apparel of three or four was neater or of better quality than that of the others. But as they sipped or tossed off their whisky and puffed or chewed their cigars there was one thing these men had in common: they plainly were good, solid, honest men. After scrutinizing them, one would be likely to say that they were the small-town professional and business types one would expect to find working at a roll-top desk or walking purposefully along any main street in America. The hard-headed, common-horse-sense kind, the backbone of the community.

"Have a shot, Tony?" asked Foster, getting up and crossing to the washstand.

"About three fingers, thanks."

Foster took a bottle and glass from the marble-top washstand, which was being used as a bar, and poured the amount. Tony took the glass, and seeing no empty chair, he lowered the lid of Foster's trunk and sat on that.

"Sorry I'm late."

"I wondered what you were doing," said Foster innocently.

"What? Oh, I left her quite a while ago. I made the mistake of going

to a little game afterward." The memory of the way the dice had rolled appeared not to be pleasant, but he shrugged it off. "What do you think of marriage as an institution?"

"You really meant what you told me in the restaurant then," said Foster. "I thought maybe it was part of an act." He eased his muscular frame into the armchair. "Local girl?"

"North Carolina."

"Ah, sweet honey and magnolia. Eh, Charlie?"

The lanky, leathery man addressed as Charlie recrossed his skinny legs, trousered in black broadcloth. He spoke with an Alabama drawl. "The South, suh—studs the crown—of this great and mighty nation—with its fairest—jewels." He swallowed between each deliberate pause, his Adam's apple jiggling his black string tie.

"Just hearing Charlie," said Foster admiringly, "you'd know he'd been a Deep South circuit judge and a good one, now wouldn't you? For the most part, anyway, a good one," he added, lifting his glass to his lips, so that a diamond solitaire sparkled on his extended little finger.

Tony took out a Turkish Trophies and lighted it. An august man with a graying pompadour and a network of blue veins in his pink slablike cheeks, who was neither drinking nor smoking, sat bolt upright on the sofa. He pointed a square finger of scorn.

"Cigarettes!" he thundered. "A nail in your coffin, young man. Indulgence of the devil!"

"Okay, Rev.," said Tony, sending a trumpet-shaped cloud his way. The righteous accuser blew his cheeks. Several of the men frowned.

Foster looked thoughtfully into his glass. "I suppose first of all we might as well face the fact, Tony, that some of these gentlemen don't favour your being with us. You might as well hear it to your face so we can get it threshed out."

Tony flipped his cigarette into a brass spittoon and got to his feet. "We might as well have the names."

"No," said Foster, "we won't settle it that way. There will be no disruption of harmony by violence as long as I'm the boss." The black-flecked eyes stabbed around the room. "And don't anybody make a mistake, Barney Foster is the boss, at all times and under all conditions." His words had the low ring of cold iron gently tapped; the overtones chilled the room. "If anybody thinks differently, there is the door and now is the time to use it."

Apparently, none of the gentlemen thought differently. They stolidly waited for him to go on. Tony sat on the trunk again, but anger still smouldered behind his long lashes.

"I've told these gentlemen that I consider you capable, Tony," Foster went on, his voice quickly warming to friendliness again. "And the job

I have for you is one I don't think any of the others here could do half as well."

Tony smiled and leaned back against the wall.

"The main objection to you seems to be your fondness for small-time con stuff. As for me, I'll admit that when I saw you yentz that sucker for fifty bucks down in the lobby last week I thought it was the prettiest thing I'd ever seen, and I couldn't help going up and telling you so."

"I didn't know how to figure you," said Tony. "You scared me."

"I thought it prettily done and I've told these gentlemen a lad has to make a living."

Tony fingered the padlock in his trousers pocket. "It's not much. A jay blew his top to-day and tried to grab his roll back. I had to skidoo in one hurry."

Foster rubbed his chin meditatively. "The game's all right. Your mistake is going it solo. You let the sucker find the padlock, then you happen up while he's jiggling with it, looking round for a key, and you have to pull by yourself the whole build-up to the placing of a bet you can open it. Even if you get his roll up, when you snap the padlock open the jay is likely to get suspicious, because it's too pat. It's going to get you a handful of real trouble one of these days, my boy." Intent on the problem, Foster leaned forward, elbows on his knees, gesturing with his left hand to emphasise his argument. "You ought to have a pal who comes up while the jay is looking over his sidewalk find. They get to talking about it. Then you stroll up, and after a while you say you believe you can open it, your pal laughs and says you can't, then you get to arguing and finally you both get mad at each other and he says he'll bet you a hundred dollars you can't open it, say. You're so mad you pull out your hundred, but when your pal counts his money, he only has fifty dollars. The jay is hot by now, and he offers to put up the other fifty. When the dough is up, you open it, and walk away with the pay-off. Even if the jay should squawk, there's two of you against one." He smiled at Tony. "See?"

Tony grinned back. "You sound like an old con man yourself."

"I'm a politician. Same difference." He studied his glass. "To make it really right, you ought to have another pal. If the jay squawks, this pal comes up and flashes a tin star and tells the three of you to beat it or he'll slam you in the hoosegow for gambling."

Tony shook his head. "That's splitting the green too many ways. I'd rather garner all the corn."

"You must learn, my boy, to share with others. You'll find it more profitable in the long run."

The other men in the room had listened to the conversation with a variety of expressions: astonishment, shock, incredulity, distaste, per-

plexity. Foster's corner-of-the-mouth slang alone would have been enough to jolt any listener, it was so different from the straightforward manner he had used theretofore. Each man looked at the others as if to say he strongly disapproved of what he had heard.

Foster ignored their discomfort. His return from slang to a quiet dignity as he turned to address the other men was swift and easy.

"At the same time you gentlemen are partly right about Tony. The one thing we've got to have is respectability, unimpeachable respectability. The first hint we aren't honest men and good Americans—we know we are, but we've got to keep *them* knowing it too—why, we're sunk. And it's the little things that count."

Foster's mouth V-ed in a sly smile. His eyes twinkled mischievously.

"Take Ollie's vest. It's a small point, but he's got to get rid of that pink and yellow vest and get himself a gray or black or white one. Ollie's got a babylike face you'd just have to trust, but any simple hick would spot the wearer of that vest for the proprietor of a string of sporting houses, which Ollie was." Ollie began to bridle, so Foster added, "And a very capable one, too."

The faces of the other men betrayed that they were startled to learn of Ollie's profession. As if challenging them, Ollie sat straight and glared about defiantly.

"All of you gentlemen have been carefully chosen by me because of certain qualifications," Foster went on blandly. "Anybody could see you're good ordinary folks and that's most important. Along that line, Tony's going to have a wife, so he seems to hope, and she'll be useful to help him put up a good front." He cocked his head at Tony. "How'd a fellow like you ever get next to a looker like her?"

Tony shrugged and traced the design of the carpet with a pointed toe.

"A couple or three of us, including myself, don't have wives," said Foster. "I'm sorry for it. But generally speaking we manage a good family atmosphere. Especially Ed Snodgrass," he laughed, "with his twelve brats."

Ed Snodgrass, a pudgy man with merry blue eyes, leered happily. "An' ever' one of 'em good for a hun'ert votes on the barrel head when they sit on the platform behind me," he piped in a New England twang. "Why right now, if it wa'n't for them kids I probable wouldn' be commissioner of Granville County."

"But how you're going to get them all out to the Territory without losing three or four on the way I don't know."

"Twon't matter if we do lose a couple," twanged Ed. "Wife's expectin' agin any day, and from the size of her I'd say it was gonna be triplets at least." His merry eyes darted around the room in search of comments on his prowess.

"Now back to why I want Tony," said Foster. "There'll be a raft of

pitchmen hit that lottery town. Three-card monte, shell, bunco, snake oil, and so forth. Those that come of their own accord we will have to line up after they get there. But lots of 'em are going to come by our invitation, because every one will be a vote and something more." He turned to Tony. "Get your railroad ticket?"

"Not yet."

"I want you to flag out to-morrow for St. Louis."

"To-morrow?"

"To-morrow! After St. Louis, make Chicago and that part of the country, then drop back to K.C. Those names I gave you will get you an entree. You know what to tell them. Another thing, gentlemen," Foster said suddenly. "I can't impress on you too strongly that we must find out immediately somehow or other when the government will pull off this land lottery. It'll be this year, because Congress has passed the act, but the date McKinley will put on the proclamation is a tight secret. But it can be smelled out." He swung around to Tony. "Why haven't you got your ticket? No money?"

Tony reached in a side pocket and pulled out a few wadded bills. He counted them. "Nine dollars. And a little change."

"I don't like being hit up for money. I've told you that."

"I'm not asking for anything."

"A bright lad like you can raise railroad fare. I want you to leave here to-morrow! Understand me?"

Tony bit his lip to hold down his anger. He nodded.

"Con that padlock if you have to. But remember, once we hit Oklahoma Territory no more of that. You'll start playing in the big leagues then."

"I'm through with the padlock."

The black-flecked eyes probed him. "I'll wait till the honeymoon flush wears off and you're both broke and hungry before I agree with you on that." Tony reddened. Foster laughed. "Nothing like good resolutions, though." Tony said nothing. "Sure you're not cooling to this proposition?"

"I'm sure."

"I don't want anybody lukewarm just because a girl has made him decide he ought to reform or something."

"I'm not lukewarm!" Tony lashed out. "I'm saying this is legitimate."

"Hell yes, it's legitimate. This is a democracy, isn't it? Politics is a legitimate game."

He swung around to the other men.

"Now then, gentlemen, this thing of three-card monte dealers and bunco steers may seem like small potatoes. But when I ran for Congress in New York I forgot the simple thing of voting the tombstone names.

Tammany didn't. And my opponent is sitting over there in the Capitol in a seat that rightfully belongs to me. The reason these small potatoes are important is that they can be organised in a hurry. All we care about is the first election. Just one year is all I ask.

"This sweet lottery town is my baby. I've worked out the deal in every detail and I'm watching every item. Somebody's got to get acquainted with these small fry, line them up and keep them lined up for their—shall we be blunt and just say their pay-offs? I'm sorry if I shock you, but would any of you gentlemen like to take this job over from Tony?"

No one spoke.

"You, Ollie Cook, you've agreed to handle the big casino, the sporting houses, dance halls, and saloons. That's a man-sized job. You've got to run out to Chicago to sell the saloon-keeps and big time operators on going out there. Then you're going down to New Orleans to let some of your madam friends and their girls in on the jackpot that's in the offing. You wouldn't want to play around with Tony's little boys, would you?"

Ollie Cook made a scornful sound.

"You, Henry Gottleib!"

A pig-jowled little German sitting on the bed shifted uneasily and clutched his heavy gold watch chain.

"You're going to be one of the new town's biggest drygoods merchants, Henry. In an emporium you're going to build with the insurance money from that store which burned in Reading. You wouldn't want Tony's job, would you?"

Gottleib sputtered saliva in his excitement. "I did not know ven I talked mitt you dere would be dis undesirable element at all. I do not like some of dis talk. I am an honest man."

"A seamstress who slept in the back of your store burned to death!" The words exploded from Foster's thinned lips like a stream of bullets. "You're an arsonist and a murderer and you know damn well I can prove it."

Gottleib's face fell unhappily. He took off his pearl gray hat and wiped the moist band with a wadded handkerchief. A dignified man with full-blown moustache, sitting beside him on the bed, stared reproachfully at Gottleib and moved away from him.

"I only wish to say I am a businessman, like Mr. Horner, and like Mr. Carver, dere."

Horner, of the full-blown moustache, and Carver both snorted.

"Uff dese pitchmen, you call dem, I know noddin. But vateffer you say I am happy to do. I only wish to recoup my fortunes and be a chentleman of invluence."

"You will, Henry, you will," smiled Foster. "And you, Reverend Mr. Haley." Foster turned to the righteous gentleman with the veined slab

cheeks. He had fumed with increasing indignation at what he had been hearing, and had moved to the edge of the sofa as if prepared to bolt from the room. "You're going to be a parson of influence, aren't you? To influence the town's church crowd in favour of the right people? Do you think you could handle pitchmen on the side?"

The Reverend Mr. Haley sprang to his feet.

"That's right," said Foster, "what you want is a church, isn't it? And you're going to have one."

"I had no idea I was mixed up with such—such—" exploded Mr. Haley.

"Didn't you? Well, Reverend, let me warn you of just one thing. The first time I hear of you trying to lift the skirts of another choir singer I'll pistol whip you myself."

"Sir—" howled Mr. Haley.

"You've been read out of three churches for that little stunt, and you ought to have learned your lesson by now."

"You are reviling a man of the cloth," cried Mr. Haley. "I'll not—" He strode to the door and yanked it open.

"You can't get a pulpit east of the Mississippi and you know it," said Foster. "Go if you want to, but we meet here to-morrow morning at eleven for the last time, if you change your mind."

"I'll not change it! Good-bye." The Reverend banged the door behind him.

Foster laughed. He glanced around at the other men in the room and his heavy shoulders shook with suppressed merriment. "You, Slim Carver, our honest real estate dealer, you did a stretch for forging title deeds. Maybe you met some pitchmen there?"

Carver blushed and lowered his heavy lids.

"No? How about you, Jerry Horner, our honest druggist of abortion pill fame in Rochester?"

Horner exhaled through his moustaches like a pricked balloon.

"You, Frank Everett, our honest caterer whose food poisoned the Indianapolis asylum patients? And you, Charlie Tanner, our honest judge from Alabama? And you, Ed Snodgrass, our honest commissioner who—"

"Never mind," twanged Ed Snodgrass hurriedly. "I know."

"None of you wants Tony's job? Very well, then. Our young Tony begins to look lily white beside you honourable gents, doesn't he?"

Foster chuckled. "You seem a little surprised to learn the truth about one another. When I brought you together the other time at our first meeting, to get everybody acquainted, I didn't mention these unpleasant subjects. I wanted to see if you could fool one another. And every last one of you did. Except maybe you got on to Tony a little."

"If each one of you struck the rest as an honest man, that's a good enough test for me." He let his laughter come out full and slapped a knee. "Damn, it was fun watching each one of you crooks spread it on to the others. You wouldn't have guessed about Tony if he could have resisted the temptation to nick Jerry Horner for ten bucks with his trick padlock."

The men looked crestfallen and uncomfortable. Foster's tone became soothing.

"Just remember, every one of you knows as much on the others as they do on you. Nobody can very well say anything. What every one of you wants is a new chance where your past is unknown. Somehow you've messed up your lives and you'd like a chance to gain the respect of a community again. You're capable men and you're going to have your opportunity. I'll guarantee it. As far as I'm concerned your past mistakes will never be mentioned again from this moment—unless it becomes necessary."

He rose and began pacing the floor. He peeled off the band from a cigar and thrust it into his mouth.

"Here's the general layout. We'll meet here to-morrow, then we strike out in different directions and lay low until just before the lottery. Then we head for Oklahoma Territory. We don't know each other, understand? None of us ever saw any of the others before.

"I want you all to be in El Reno for the lottery registration. It won't hurt if some of us win farms. Good, respectable background. There'll be thirteen thousand farms dished out free. Right in the middle of this country the government has laid out a town site to serve the region. It's going to be one hell of a town, I can tell you. Yessir, one hell of a town."

His excitement penetrated to the others. They leaned forward eagerly.

"Those thousands of people who come to live in that town are going to be so all-hell-fired hot about getting started they're going to be blind to anything going on around them. They'll have no organisation, and the fellows with the organisation—that's us—will have it easy. It's going to be a boom town crawling with suckers. There's going to be dough for the biggest clean-up in grifter history. And every grifter's going to pay through the nose for the privilege of operating.

"And when the town starts wanting its water works and sewer system, its telephones and electric light plant and its city hall and its paving—who's going to let those contracts and franchises?"

He clapped his big hands and pointed around the room.

"Why you are, gentlemen of the city-council-to-be and associates, and I'm sure you'll do a good job.

"Yes sir, it's going to be democratic and American, just like they want it, and you're going to be the most respectable, progressive reform-minded, clean-cut, solid and sterling bunch of goddam candidates that

ever fleeced a town, if I have to beat your brains out to do it! Come on, boys, let's have a drink."

Foster strode to the washstand. The others followed and took the drinks he poured.

"And do I hear somebody ask how I can be sure that all this is going to happen to that lovely town of aspiration and hope? I'll tell you."

Foster raised his glass. "I give you me, Barney Foster, gentlemen, the guy who's going to be the head man, the big cheese, the great red rooster—the mayor of the town himself!"

Drawing the dressing gown close about her, Sawyer peeked out the bathroom door to make sure the hall was empty. She heard Martha humming a snatch of tune, dressing in her room. The McCraes' bedroom, and farther along, Allen Dunbar's, were silent. They must have already gone down. She would have to hurry not to be late for dinner. She ran across to her own room.

CHAPTER FOUR

SAWYER slipped on her chemise, drew the strings of the small corset which girdled her slender waist, pulled on her corset cover and petticoats, then seated herself at the gilt dressing table and rolled up her hair—the colour of honey, he had said.

As she worked with the pins, she told herself she would put on the pink taffeta dinner dress, the one her father had picked out last fall. But her perverse self kept seeing hanging in the closet the yellow satin evening gown.

Martha had brought in the gown that morning and offered it to Sawyer to reinforce her argument that Sawyer should go to the Ball with the family. It probably wouldn't hurt just to try it on. The old pink taffeta didn't match her present mood—if it had ever matched any mood of hers. She had never had on a dress made in Paris. Why not wear the yellow satin down to dinner at least? When the others had gone on to the Ball, she could come back upstairs and take it off.

She went to the closet and ran her hands over the gown. She took down the little kidney-shaped hip pad, and, feeling silly, tied the strap around her waist. She went to the pier glass and looked back over her shoulder. She wriggled a little, blushed, and giggled, and hurried back to the closet and slipped on the yellow gown. She was turning and posing, admiring her bare shoulders, when Martha tapped and entered.

"Oh," said Martha.

Something in her expression and tone gave Sawyer a feeling that Martha had been struck with the suspicion that she was going to be outshone. At that, the white gown with big red flowers which Martha was wearing *wasn't* as attractive. Why did Martha wear something which made her look even bigger than she was? Of course, Martha couldn't have worn the yellow satin, not now; it must have been something from last year, because Martha had become, well, plumper.

But it wasn't kind to have such ungracious thoughts. Martha had brought her the gown; she did want her to look nice.

"You look stunning!" exclaimed Sawyer. "Mr. Dunbar will be dazzled."

"And you're *perfectly* gorgeous," said Martha. "And you *are* going to the Ball with us!"

Smiling languidly, hand lightly on her waist, Sawyer struck a pose.

"No, my dear, this lady of the naughty French court won't be able to attend with you-all, as she has an appointment with the king's first minister. But she will condescend to dine with you common people in

this old dress, which, as you can see, is carelessly spun of the finest gold."

"Now Sawyer! Stop it!"

They both laughed, and embraced, and Sawyer reseated herself and began screwing on a pair of gold earrings, set with emeralds. Before her on the table lay a curiously worked gold and emerald necklace.

"Darling, how lovely!" said Martha. "I didn't know you had these."

"They were Mother's," said Sawyer. "Papa got them out and gave them to me to wear just before we came. I didn't know about them." She touched the necklace lovingly.

"How nice of him! Your father is so nice to you when he wants to be."

"Well, to tell the truth," said Sawyer, "I think mainly he wanted to show you Northerners that Southern families have a *few* nice things left."

"Oh, Sawyer."

"He practically said so," added Sawyer wryly.

"You know," said Martha, "I've always felt you didn't get along perfectly with your father—from things you've sort of hinted."

"I?" said Sawyer. "Why, I think Papa's a darling!"

"Well, the way he so abruptly came and took you out of school . . ."

"Oh that," said Sawyer, dismissing it with a wave of the hand. "Papa simply decided the school wasn't wholly respectable, that's all. You have to understand how strictly respectable all the old Southern families are. I mean, it's a part of a very long tradition. I suppose it seems sort of old-fashioned to many people now, but it's still kept as the rule which guides our lives." She put the necklace up to her throat. "Will you hook it in back there, dear?"

Martha snapped the necklace, then stood looking at Sawyer's reflection in the oval mirror for a moment. She turned away and flounced on the edge of the bed.

"I could break Allen Dunbar's neck!" she burst out. "I'd like to choke him to death!"

Sawyer turned round from the dressing table. "Why, darling, what makes you say that?"

"He won't marry me. He never, never will. I'm not clever enough."

Sawyer tilted her head disbelieving. "You could wrap any man around your little finger."

"Oh, *most* men, maybe. But not Allen. He's going out to some wild Western frontier, and I've wracked my brains for some way to keep him from it, and I'm just not clever enough."

"But there isn't any frontier now, is there? I don't know much about geography, but—"

"Allen says there is. Out God knows where somewhere. His whole family's going. Imagine! A perfectly ancient Philadelphia family suddenly becoming common pioneers! It's that old Mr. Overton Dunbar doing it,

that's who!! Oh, Allen says he wouldn't think of staying himself. Just going to help the family get re-settled, that's all. But if he goes, he'll stay, I just know it."

"Well, couldn't you go out to him if he does?"

"I? I be a pioneer woman in calico and sunbonnet and wash clothes in a log cabin or whatever they do? I should say not. This is the twentieth century. If Allen Dunbar wants to marry me he can just come to Washington to practice."

"Would he like to do that?"

"I don't know—for sure. Allen is so hard to get anything out of. You never know what he's really thinking. Sometimes when he says something he may just be being cynical and really mean the opposite. It's what Harvard did to him, I guess."

"But he seems very fond of you, Martha."

"Oh, we were children together. I was much the younger, of course. Sawyer, do you think Allen is too old for me? He's twenty-eight."

Sawyer considered. "Well, that's pretty old. But I like for the man to be a little older than the woman."

"When we were next door neighbours in Philadelphia years ago it was a family joke we would be married when we grew up. He used to pull me in my wagon when I was practically a baby. Then we came to Washington and when Allen finally went to Harvard he came down from Cambridge a couple of times to see Mother and the Judge, but he always treated me like the eleven-or-twelve-year-old I was, and I thought him a smart alec college boy. But since he went to war, and was a cavalry lieutenant and fought in the Philippines—well, there's something about him now, and I think he looks on me differently, and I don't know whether I really *love* him or not, but if he doesn't marry me I just don't know what I'll do because I've got my mind made up to it!"

What a child Martha is in her relationships with the opposite sex, thought Sawyer; imagine how hopelessly awkward Martha would have been in the adventure of the afternoon with Mr. Anthony Tyndall, a situation requiring adroitness and poise.

Sawyer rose and went to Martha and put a comforting arm around her shoulders.

"Already I think Allen may like you better than he does me," pouted Martha.

"Me? Poor me?"

"Well, coming home from the Inauguration, after we lost you, he was very much put out—I mean, in a strange kind of way. He was angry—I almost felt he was *jealous*—because you had disappeared with another man."

"Oh, Martha! What an imagination! You actually thought he was?"

"Well, not actually, of course. But Allen's upset—about life, I mean. I'm not supposed to mention this to *anybody*, and you mustn't hint to Mother or the Judge that I have. But ever since Allen came home from the war, he hasn't been able to settle his mind to anything. He's been at loose ends. His parents—especially his mother—she's very much concerned about him, and I happen to know that while it's true that he's here on business for his father, Mrs. Dunbar has been corresponding with my mother to have the Judge get him into the law office here. Allen doesn't know that—all he knows is that the Judge has offered him a place—at least, I *think* that's all he knows—you can never tell with Allen, he is so *intuitive*. But anyway, the whole idea is to give him an interest in life."

"But what's wrong with him?" asked Sawyer. "He seems perfectly normal to me."

"Oh, there's nothing *wrong* with him. Not really, I mean. Oh, I wish I could tell you."

"So do I."

"Well-I-I-I," Martha hesitated. "Promise on your dying oath you'll never breathe a word?"

"I'll never!"

Martha lowered her voice to a conspiratorial level. "It's something that happened on Luzon—I think it was—I never can keep those Philippine islands straight. Allen himself doesn't know that I know about it—his mother wrote my mother and she told the Judge and me. Allen probably wouldn't have been so affected by it if he hadn't always been so darn idealistic—always going out of his way to help the underdog—so it's really his own fault. Well . . ."

Sawyer listened as Martha related how Allen, after his graduation, had become increasingly indignant over reports of Spanish cruelty in Cuba, until on the outbreak of war he had enlisted to help the Cubans win their independence. Instead of Cuba, however, Allen's troop was sent out to the Philippines. By the time the transport arrived, Manila had fallen and the war with Spain was over. And by then American arms were being used against the Filipinos themselves. Instead of fighting Spanish tyranny by the side of Filipinos struggling for freedom, Allen and his comrades found themselves assigned to forcing the people to submit to American colonial rule. Like a great many other Americans, Allen was shocked and disgusted by the imperialistic turn of affairs, but he had no choice except to obey orders.

Then one day, while he and his best friend, identified by Martha as Hank Somebody-or-other, were on a scouting expedition, they surprised seven Aguinaldo Insurrectos in a clearing.

Sawyer heard Martha's next words with growing horror. Hank got

down from his horse and the Insurrecto leader, who was a big man, smilingly walked up with a bolo held at his side in an attitude of surrender. When Hank reached for the knife the man swung it and decapitated him. Allen shot and killed the slayer of his friend at once. The other six Insurrectos tried to flee, but Allen ran them down, shooting and sabreing them. Then, recovering from his fury sufficiently to get down and examine the bodies, he discovered that all six had been boys, none of them more than sixteen years old.

"Oh, Martha!"

"Well, gracious, Sawyer, they were soldiers."

"But just boys," said Sawyer, "trying to get away."

"They were the enemy," insisted Martha. "Allen doesn't seem to mind shooting the man who treacherously killed his friend, but the others—he thinks it made him a murderer. Do you know what he did? They gave him a medal and he actually refused it, and wrote a perfectly outrageous letter in which he said we were all murderers attempting to enslave innocent people. It very nearly cost the young gentleman his commission."

"I can see why he would do that," said Sawyer, slowly.

"Well, I can't. The idiot! Can you imagine a man accepted as a hero acting like a child? Why his mother told my mother that if anybody so much as hints at the incident he begins to tremble and can hardly speak. It just seems incredible that a man as handsome and intelligent as he is should go to pieces like a weakling over an heroic act."

Sawyer shook her head thoughtfully. "When something terrible happens in your life, Martha, it's almost impossible not to let it affect you. It sort of influences everything you do."

Martha smiled, condescendingly. "Now what do you know about terrible things in life, my sweet innocent?"

Sawyer dismissed the question with a laugh. "Oh, I don't mean anything terrible ever happened in mine, but—"

"Oh, well," said Martha, "everybody is sure he'll forget it when he gets busy at something like practising law with the judge, so just don't let on you know a bit of this. Allen might be so furious he would never speak to me again. I don't care what his attitude is about anything if he'll just marry me. I *want* to get married, and every other man I know who could even be considered I simply detest. Please, Sawyer, don't do anything to make him like you."

"Martha! How could you even suggest such a thing? What," she asked, "makes you think he'd pay any attention to me?"

"If you could hear what even the Judge said about you—"

"What did he?"

"I'm *not* going to turn your head with flattery," said Martha. They both laughed. "You're ready? Then let's go down."

Her full yellow skirt billowing, Sawyer swiftly descended the long curving stairs, with an appearance of floating downward. It was an accomplishment she had mastered after long practice, when alone, on the stairs at home. Frowning slightly, Martha tried to keep pace, a step or so behind. At the foot of the stairs Sawyer turned with a smile and hooked an arm in Martha's and they crossed to the drawing-room together.

It was a large room, with a number of illuminated oil paintings glowing softly against beige walls flecked with gold, and over-furnished with Victorian richness. At the far end, before a fire, Judge and Mrs. McCrae and Dunbar were conversing. The men broke off to rise and greet them.

Judge McCrae warmly reached out both hands for Sawyer's, exclaiming, "Enchanting, enchanting." He offered her a delicate Hepplewhite chair.

Allen greeted Martha with a friendly, "Hello, there!" She sank to the small sofa he had been occupying and he divided the tails of his coat and re-seated himself beside her.

Mrs. McCrae turned to Sawyer. "Does the evening gown mean you've decided to go to the Ball with us, dear?" she asked, her voice as velvety as her black choker. "I understood you to say this morning you thought your father would prefer that you didn't."

"Well," said Sawyer hesitantly, "I've been thinking about it. He might not mind so very much."

"I expect you had better do whatever you think your father would wish."

"Yes," said Sawyer, "I suppose I had."

Mrs. McCrae turned to say something to Allen. Sawyer studied her thoughtfully. A large woman, well-corseted beneath her blue-black velvet gown, Mrs. McCrae's somewhat high and mighty manner had, until this evening, intimidated Sawyer. To-night, though, Sawyer considered Mrs. McCrae hardly her superior at all: hadn't she successfully kept from the woman, imposing and shrewd as she might appear to be, all knowledge of her adventure of the afternoon? As soon as she could figure the best way to do it, Sawyer was pretty sure she could yet make Mrs. McCrae think it would be all right for her to go to the Ball. Why, the way she, by far the most beautiful woman in the room, felt at this moment, she could do just about anything she set her mind to.

From the corners of her eyes. Sawyer noticed that Allen Dunbar, who had only glanced at her as she entered, was looking at her again. Martha noticed too; she quickly offered Allen a sip of her own sherry. Sawyer's lips twitched with satisfaction.

"We were discussing the big lottery," said Judge McCrae. He occupied his wing chair with magisterial ease, fingertips touching as in the child's game of "This-is-the-church-and-this-is-the-steeple." His beak of a nose

and pale blue eyes suggested a bird of prey about to pounce. "I found out for Allen to-day what his father sent him here to try to learn," he said jovially. "It's not supposed to be known, this matter of just when the President will order the lottery held and the country thrown open, but there are ways, of course, of finding out." He spread his hands and smiled, in the manner of one who knows his Washington and his politics. "Not altogether ethical of me, perhaps, but if one can't help an old friend—wel-l-l . . ."

"When will the old lottery be, Allen?" asked Martha.

"The Judge says the middle of July."

Judge McCrae laughed heartily. "There goes the great secret without even a fight. Ah woman, thy name is Delilah."

Allen shifted in confusion. "But sir, I thought Martha—that is—"

"It doesn't matter," said the Judge. "The main thing is, your father will know."

"Father will be grateful," said Allen. "It will be a great help."

"Why will it help?" asked Martha.

"Now Father will know when is the best time to wind up the affairs of his export firm and begin buying hardware stock to be shipped out to that country. He'll have that much of a jump on other hardware men who may be thinking of going out there but who will have to act at the last moment."

Mrs. McCrae sniffed. "Why Overton Dunbar wants to abandon a perfectly sound export business that has been in the family for four generations in order to start a wilderness hardware store—of all things!—well, it's beyond my understanding."

"And why must you go?" asked Martha.

"I thought I told you. I've no intention of remaining out there after the family has been re-established."

His answer did not satisfy mother and daughter. They both took deep breaths to lay down a barrage of arguments against his going at all. Judge McCrae winked at Sawyer, she lifted her glass to her lips to cover a smile.

Snaring a husband must be a harrowing undertaking, thought Sawyer; she had never seen the game played before. It would be easier to sympathise with Mr. Dunbar, she decided, if he did not seem so completely able to take care of himself. She wondered if he knew Martha and her mother were trying to lay him by the heels. Surely he did. He seemed to have an affection for Martha, but did he actually love her? It might be he was enjoying the pursuit, intending to surrender at the right moment. Martha was right: it was impossible to read his mind. His steady hazel eyes and his wide, straight mouth betrayed nothing. Of course, his subdued manner might reflect a sincere dislike of display. He wasn't bad-looking. Scrutinising his calm face, Sawyer wondered just how deeply the

horrible affair on Luzon had affected him. It was difficult to think of him as a man who had single-handed killed half a dozen human beings in the space of seconds.

He looked at her suddenly. She returned his gaze steadily.

He was talking at the moment, and his words faltered almost imperceptibly before he looked away. Sawyer had never experienced before the quick thrill of coquetry. She stirred in her chair with what felt comfortably like feline ease.

As the others chatted and she listened with apparent interest, Sawyer waited for his glance to fall on her again, and when his eyes turned once more to her, as she was confident they would, she deliberately gazed until he broke it off, ever so slightly disturbed. It was a risky little game, for Martha was suspicious, and Sawyer had to be sure where Martha herself was looking, but the danger heightened the thrill. Martha needn't worry. She just wanted to show herself that she could make a conquest of *two* men, both in one day—a girl who could do that surely couldn't be altogether plain. She wouldn't actually betray Martha for anything—certainly not for Allen Dunbar. Oh, possibly if his chestnut hair were a little darker, more brownish, his lashes a little longer, if he were younger and had a certain dash of recklessness, and if his eyes were a sombre brown . . . She closed her eyes: she had not meant to go so far.

Samson, the McCraes' coloured butler, announced dinner. They went into the cream panelled dining-room; silver and crystal gleamed in the candlelight. Once they were seated and the coloured footman had begun serving, Judge McCrae asked Allen about the current theatrical season in New York, where he had visited friends shortly before.

Allen had found the famed beauty of Ethel Barrymore acceptable, though her vehicle, something about a Captain Jinks, was absurd, he thought. The music of *Floradora* was worthless, the musical only partly saved by a certain freshness possessed by six girls who sang and danced. Mansfield in *Monsieur Beaucaire* was passable and Julia Marlowe in *When Knighthood Was in Flower* adequate, though both plays, in his opinion, were nonsense.

"Oh dear," sighed Mrs. McCrae, "now you've ruined the trip Martha and I had planned to see the plays."

"Forgive me," said Allen.

"Why do you go to the theatre, Allen, if you don't enjoy it?"

"I *do* enjoy the theatre," said Allen. "But our American playwrights are writing rubbish. If only there was something this season by Ibsen or Shaw—"

"Oh, Ibsen," said Mrs. McCrae, shuddering, "and that Socialist! There's no *entertainment* in them."

"But they face the realities of life," said Allen.

"Oh Mother, I think Allen is so right," said Martha.

"Yes," confessed Mrs. McCrae, "I suppose he is."

"Was the play anything like the book, Mr. Dunbar?" asked Sawyer.

"Which play, Miss Bolton?"

"I mean, *When Knighthood Was in Flower*."

"I've not read it," said Allen. "I gather from the nature of the play, though, that it is a book having little resemblance to real life."

"Oh," said Sawyer. She felt practically illiterate and very sorry she had spoken. Why had he cut her so? Did he think her flirtation cheap, and had he chosen this way to tell her so?

"You're quite right, Allen," said Martha. "We've so little culture in America."

"Oh, a little perhaps, to be fair," said Allen. "Whatever we've been wise enough to copy from Europe. But when we try to create without copying—well, is there a city in America that can compare with Paris, or Rome, or Berlin?" He turned to Sawyer. "Have you ever been to Europe, Miss Bolton?" he smiled.

"No, I haven't," said Sawyer. "But Papa's going to take me soon."

At once she wished she hadn't phrased it in a way that made her seem a child who would be led by the hand. She ought to have said, "Papa and I are going soon."

"I'm sure you'll enjoy it," said Allen. "The only trouble is, it will make you unhappy to return to our own ugly cities."

"How perceptive," said Mrs. McCrae.

"How *penetrating* you are," added Martha.

It wasn't even amusing, Sawyer decided, this fawning approval of what seemed to her to be superciliousness. Surprising, the way Allen Dunbar was talking; his rude, cynical attitude upset the favourable impression he had made on her. She wondered that she had had a desire to flirt with him in the drawing-room—he was so objectionable now. She was glad when Judge McCrae began favouring her with a good-natured raillery concerning her getting lost at the Inauguration; she responded laughingly to his joshing.

Meanwhile, Allen disclosed that he planned to return to Philadelphia next day, and mother and daughter intensified their stalking.

"If you *should* happen to stay in that barbaric country," said Martha, "all your law education would go for nothing. The war has interrupted your career enough as it is, it seems to me."

"You'd just be losing yourself in a forest," lamented Mrs. McCrae.

Allen toyed with his wine goblet. "Except that I don't believe there is a forest. As I understand it, it's a prairie region—part of an Indian reservation, lying unused, which the Indians have sold to the government for homesteading. I suppose there's no reason why it shouldn't be settled,

but, as I've said, I don't care to have any part of it myself."

"Wasn't there something like this a dozen years ago?" asked Mrs. McCrae. "Where the people lined up in wagons and on horseback and all dashed off at high noon or something?"

"That was Oklahoma Territory, which lies near this area," said Allen. "Because in that rush the best land was gotten by the man with the fastest horse, it was felt this time a lottery would be fairer."

"There'd be no law practice out there except defending horse-thieves," persisted Martha.

Allen smiled. "And don't you suppose posses just hang them anyway?"

"Thank goodness," said Mrs. McCrae, "you haven't been bitten by this bug like your father. But there is a great opportunity for brilliant young lawyers like Allen in Washington, isn't there, Judge?"

"Yes dear," said the Judge. "Won't *you* have more of this sauce, Sawyer?"

Mrs. McCrae shot him a look, but his face was innocent of guile.

"The Judge has been most kind in offering to help me get established in a Washington practice," said Allen.

Martha and her mother exchanged glances of hope.

"But Father's mania can be understood, even though one doesn't approve," he went on. "The promise of a new beginning has aroused hope in many Americans since the first dissatisfied Englishmen came to these shores, and that drive carried them across the continent to the Pacific."

"But we should be done with that sort of thing," protested Mrs. McCrae. "This is the twentieth century."

"Yes," said Allen, "I've heard that said quite often the last two months. It's getting to be almost a slogan, isn't it? As if everything possible had been accomplished, and all we have to do henceforth is enjoy the fruits."

Mrs. McCrae wasn't sure if it was intended to be a polite reprimand, he said it so casually.

"But you're almost correct in one respect—the country has been nearly all settled. This lottery may divide the last of the free land. That's why I don't like to think of Father's being involved in it."

"Why, Allen?"

"Doubtless there are many discontented Americans—we could say tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands, there's no way of knowing—who are possessed with that vague wish to have a new start in life. Have you ever wished you could go back to childhood and then come forward again on a different—and better—road? This is a promise of something like that, I should guess. It would be futile to guess how many of these people will actually be moved to action by the announcement of what appears to be the final opportunity to fulfil that desire.

"But if they descend on this place in the numbers one might well expect, it could be as devastating as a plague of locusts. I'm afraid Father doesn't quite grasp the financial risk."

Mrs. McCrae sighed. "If only your father had your sense, Allen."

"Sense has little to do with it. If Father is an example, the thing becomes an obsession. He has become completely dissatisfied with himself. He argues he has no feeling of being a part of the *real* Philadelphia, because he didn't help build it. The same with the firm—it was handed down to him pretty much as it is now. He talks of helping to build a town that's fresh and honest, with an exciting air of freedom, a town which has to look forward because it has no past to look back to—"

"It all sounds mad," said Mrs. McCrae. And noticing Sawyer seemed preoccupied and out of the conversation, she said, "Don't you agree, dear?"

Something in Dunbar's report of his father's dream had struck a chord in Sawyer's heart. Impulsively, she burst out:

"No! I think it might be wonderful to be in a completely new country, so that you could be new too—so your life could be lived the way you wanted it, instead . . . instead of—"

She became aware of Allen's lifted eyebrows—as if her rush of words was not quite ladylike?—and of Martha's and Mrs. McCrae's disapproving looks. She stopped in confusion.

"Very pretty! Don't let me interrupt you!"

There was a whiplash of sarcasm in the shrill voice. Hearing it behind her, Sawyer cringed. The others looked toward the doorway.

Amos Bolton stood there. He had on a long brown overcoat, and he was twisting a brown felt hat in his hands. Samson stood behind him, his expression begging Judge McCrae to understand that he had tried without success to keep Bolton from charging into the dining-room. Judge McCrae rose, grasping his napkin in his left hand. The butler disappeared.

"Why, Mr. Bolton," said the Judge. "We didn't expect you back from Baltimore to-night."

"Obviously," snapped Bolton. "But I finished my tobacco dealings there—they're all thieves and frauds in Baltimore—and I have some business to transact here in the morning before taking my daughter back to Raleigh—where she belongs. I just came by to find out—to see if—"

And then, for a moment, the candlelight, the gleaming silver, the quiet civility of the company appeared to have reminded him of a day when he was a gracious host, and he turned to Mrs. McCrae with a dignified bow.

"Your forgiveness, madam, for this rudeness. I was only concerned for my daughter's welfare. I should have known that, as your guest, she—" He stopped as if he could not remember how to go on.

Judge McCrae said jovially: "Then if you're free this evening why not go to the Ball with us? A little dancing will—"

Bolton's eyes relit with fury as he became aware that everybody was in evening dress. His stare rested on Sawyer. She put a hand to her throat, as if to conceal her décolletage.

"To the Ball?" he said hoarsely. "You were going to the Ball."

"No," said Sawyer, "I wasn't."

"You were going to dance with strange men," he said. "Just as *she* was always wanting to do." He came across the room toward her.

"I wasn't going," repeated Sawyer, rising.

Bolton seized her by an arm.

"Oh now, sir," said the Judge.

"I must speak to my daughter alone. A father's right."

He took her from the dining-room. The others heard his angry voice receding in the hall beyond: "I knew how it would be if I let you come! I thought I would be close enough in Baltimore—but no! You're just like your mother was. Dancing—the same excuse—so he could hold her in—" By then, his words were beyond their hearing.

Mrs. McCrae gasped. "Really!"

Allen had put one hand on the arm of his chair, as if to rise, but now he removed it; and Judge McCrae re-seated himself thoughtfully, saying "Martha, I'm afraid you made a mistake."

"Of course she did!" said Mrs. McCrae. "If I'd had any idea the kind of family that girl came from, you would never have invited her to this house."

"But Mother," protested Martha, "I didn't know her father would come and behave like this. I didn't think Sawyer herself would come when I wrote and asked her—though I was glad she could come. At Gridley I liked her better than any girl there."

"But—"

"But Mother! She comes of a good family, especially on her mother's side, I know. Though her mother's been dead since Sawyer was a child."

"Oh dear," said Mrs. McCrae.

"But I've seen a snapshot of their house in Raleigh. It's huge, with a great turret at one corner."

"What does the size of a house have to do with—"

"But while we were at school, her father wrote her the nicest letters."

"But didn't he take her out of school before the year had ended?"

"Well, yes."

"Why?" asked Judge McCrae. "I hadn't heard this."

"Oh, we weren't *sure* why," said Martha. "Miss Fennel—she's the head-mistress, Allen—she told us it was because of Sawyer's health. But Sawyer was perfectly well. One of the girls heard Mr. Bolton—well, shouting—"

in Miss Fennel's office and as well as we could figure— You see, the school had invited him to our spring german—just as they used to invite you two—and he came right away and took Sawyer home. *We* decided it was because he was against dancing.”

“What did he mean just now when he said Sawyer was like her mother?” said Mrs. McCrae. “It sounded to me as if something was quite definitely—”

“I don't know what he meant and I don't care,” said Martha, very near tears. “Sawyer's had the strictest kind of life, being brought up by an old father without any mother to— How she has kept herself so sweet and kind I don't know. She doesn't know a thing about the world—she's told me her father won't let her do *anything*—and she's innocent as a baby. And I think we should be nice to her.”

“Martha's quite right,” said Judge McCrae. “Sawyer is a lovely girl, and if there has been family trouble—well, nearly all families have skeletons of some kind. For example, dear, take your grandfather and the—”

“Judge!” said Mrs. McCrae.

Judge McCrae would have chuckled, but he was cut short by a cry of pain somewhere beyond the dining-room doorway. Dunbar got to his feet so abruptly he knocked his chair over. He was at the doorway before Judge McCrae could do more than rise. Mrs. McCrae and Martha followed the men.

As they neared the great hall, they heard Bolton's angry voice.

“You've tried to pretend to these people that I forbid you pleasures. You want them to think I'm not a considerate father. You'll not make a fool of me before them. Go to the Ball! Go, go, go! But remember—don't you dance. Do you hear me? Don't you dance!”

Again the cry of pain.

Allen and the McCraes reached the archway in time to see Bolton striding toward the front door. Sawyer stood at the foot of the staircase. She was holding her left wrist.

Bolton caught sight of them and paused, his hand on the knob. His shoulders drooped.

“Again, your forgiveness. It is very difficult, being a father. I have a good many troubles, but you should not be bothered with them. You are good people, I know. But,” and the fire began to burn again, “don't think I couldn't go to the Ball with you if I wanted to. I have a ticket—a business associate—I am a tobacco man— there are others, you know, who have the social position to—to—”

He bowed stiffly and went out, closing the diamond-paned door behind him.

They turned to Sawyer. She let her wrist fall to her side as if it did not pain at all. “I can't tell you how sorry I am,” she said. “Papa's not a

bad man really. It's just that he—"

"You have our sympathy, Sawyer," said Martha, going to her.

Sawyer turned and started up the stairs.

"Where are you going?" asked Martha.

"I don't know." She stumbled and grasped the railing.

"But you're going to the Ball with us!" boomed Judge McCrae. She paused. "Your father gave permission. We insist." Sawyer turned and stared at him incredulously. He was smiling. "Speaking for myself," he said, "the Ball would be a flat failure without your beauty to grace it."

"Of course, dear," said Mrs. McCrae. "We shouldn't think of leaving you here alone."

"I'll *die* if you don't come, Sawyer," said Martha. "Darling, we *want* you to."

From her elevated position, Sawyer surveyed the group at the foot of the stairs. "Very well," she said, her voice gaining resolution as she spoke, "if you want me, I think I *will* go with you."

"Brava," murmured Allen Dunbar. She responded to his compliment with a coolly arched eyebrow.

CHAPTER FIVE

PASSING the covered stands on Pennsylvania Avenue between Fifteenth and Seventeenth Streets, where the President had reviewed the Procession that afternoon, the McCraes' well-matched black pair acted as if the electric searchlights were an every-night occurrence in their lives. The searchlight beams were played on smoke rising from Greek fire in urns atop the pylons marking off the reviewing court, and the court was outlined by strings of frosted lights which reflected on the wet pavement.

Nearing the Pension Building, where the Ball was under way, the McCraes' landau fell into a slowly moving line. A crowd held back by mounted police watched the jewelled and ermined guests leave their carriages in the glare of more searchlights.

Judge McCrae ordered his coachman to return at twelve. The party walked the gauntlet of spectators and entered the building.

As wonderful as the electric display on the avenue had been, Sawyer caught her breath when she glimpsed the lavish use of Edison's miracle, the incandescent bulb, in the decoration of the auditorium. For a background, a canopy of yellow bunting rippled beneath the skylight and covered the walls except for the President's white balcony at the west end. Then, more than fifteen thousand yellow electric lights—so it was said and so it appeared—glowed like fireflies in the garlands of green that entwined the columns supporting the galleries. Palms and ferns stood everywhere and these defenceless evergreens as well bore clusters of yellow electric blossoms.

As they entered, the orchestra was playing in waltz time the President's favourite soldiers' song of the recent war, *There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night*. But the sliding trombone could hardly be heard above the soft roar of conversation and shuffling slippers. The President sat smiling with his personal guests as they looked down on the dancers.

Checking their wraps, the McCrae party waited for an intermission before crossing the floor. They were stopped by friends to exchange dances in their programmes and to be introduced to the McCraes' two guests. Martha was piqued because her acquaintances, on meeting Sawyer and Allen, seemed to think they were together; possessively, she put a hand in the crook of Allen's elbow.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Martha. She had noticed that the fountain in the centre of the room was a mass of purple flowers "What are they?"

"A flower I had hoped never to see again," said Allen. "It's Bougain-villaea, flower of the Philippines."

"They're lovely," said Mrs. McCrae.

"You'd hardly think so if you—" He shrugged.

Martha glanced at Sawyer significantly. Sawyer nodded understandingly.

They found several unoccupied chairs under the gallery. The orchestra began playing another waltz. Both Judge McCrae and Allen asked Sawyer for dances in their programmes. When she asked to be excused from dancing, they did not press her. The two couples left her sitting near a company of diamond-encrusted Washington matrons of too much bulk and too little breath to negotiate the waltz.

Sawyer let her eyes wander about the auditorium. She saw many men, their severe black-and-white attire contrasting with the colourful silks and satins of their partners, but she did not see the one figure she was sure she would recognize.

The matrons around her cackled away, the passing dancers providing them with an ever-freshening source of gossip: the scandalous gown, the Senator's unattractive partner, the cunning long hip now in fashion . . .

But for Sawyer this was a pageant sparkling before her, representing that laughter and song were good, and that to be happy and free was normal. There on the floor were to be seen no cruelty, no distorted fancies, no inhuman harshness. All was gay and carefree and worth the living. Like the Chablis that afternoon, the scene which Sawyer drank in through her eyes began to light up summer sunlight in her.

As the Ball went on, the McCrae party mingled more and more with other parties. Sawyer was drawn deeper into blithesome patter of brilliant men and women. How did they find so much to talk about! Her eyes were glugged with bright images and pieces of images, scraps of lifting heads, speaking mouths, laughing lips, turning white shoulders, twinkling eyes, as the McCrae party moved from group to group or was approached by twosomes and foursomes.

Sawyer was temporarily alone with one such small party of people, their joyful garrulity dinning in her ears like silver bells, when Martha came off the emptying floor with Allen. She led Sawyer a little to one side.

"He's done it!" Martha whispered fiercely. "He's mine!"

Sawyer pressed Martha's plump gloved hand. "I'm so glad, Martha. How did he propose?"

"Well, he didn't exactly come right out. You know how Allen is. But as we were dancing he looked around the room and said, 'It's really almost civilized here in Washington. I don't think I should mind so much living here.' And then he looked down at me and said, 'Yes, it might be rather nice.' Isn't that delicious? I'm overcome."

"What else did he say?"

"That's all—so far. But the evening's young. With this divine music and all, if he doesn't—"

A smirking young man interrupted to remind Martha that this was his dance, and she whirled out on the floor with him. Judge and Mrs. McCrae danced off with other partners.

Allen drew up a chair beside Sawyer's.

"Are you finding this enjoyable, Miss Bolton?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. There are so many beautiful people to watch."

"I hope you won't mind if I say I think you are the most beautiful lady present?"

"You're gallant. But Martha is far lovelier."

His eyes sought out Martha on the floor. "Martha is very lovely. I am very fond of her."

"You should be. She is the sweetest girl I know."

He asked, "Do you think a young lawyer could be more fortunate than to have a junior partnership in a big Washington firm offered him?"

His cynical inflection made her glance at him curiously. "I shouldn't think so," she said.

"No," he said. "Neither should I." He dropped the acid tone and asked. "How do you like Washington?"

She told him how grand she thought it was, and they both hoped it wouldn't rain any more, and they talked of the decorations. As she held up her end of the polite conversation, Sawyer's eyes roved the ballroom. Becoming conscious that neither of them had spoken for some time, she looked at him. He was regarding her seriously.

"Tell me," he said, "what do you want in life?"

"What an odd question. I'd never thought of it."

"You hadn't?"

"Well, I mean nothing I could put in words. What do you want, Mr. Dunbar?"

"I don't know," he said. "I thought I knew one time. Now—maybe now what I want is just to look out for myself and make sure I get along comfortably. Great ambition, isn't it?" The bitter twist at the corner of his mouth faded and he said, "Anyway, that's what I'd about decided I'd settle for when I got here yesterday. But— By the way, I want to ask your forgiveness for being so snobbish at dinner."

"Were you?"

"I think you knew I was." His eyes asked for a truthful answer.

"Well, if you want me to be honest," said Sawyer, "I did think you were a little."

He nodded, and slowly slid the palm of one gloved hand over the back of the other. "I think maybe I acted like that because I was angry with myself—for a decision I'd just about made—and maybe I was trying out the role I saw myself in. Or maybe that wasn't it altogether. Maybe I was trying to make an impression." He looked at her. "Do you suppose either

of those could have been the reason?"

"I'm afraid I'm hopelessly tangled," said Sawyer.

A humorous, or mocking, twinkle lit his hazel eyes. "Maybe I'm the one who is," he said.

A silence fell between them.

"The music's lovely, isn't it?" ventured Sawyer.

He listened to it for a moment. "Yes," he agreed; then he studied his slowly turning hands again. "Do you know, Miss Bolton, I think at dinner I was reverting to the kind of person I was as an undergraduate—was for a time, anyway. I arrived at Cambridge, and there were the multi-millionaires' sons, ready-made careers waiting for them, and there were the pseudo-culturists—the Green Carnation crowd. I tried to imitate both of them at the same time." He smiled wryly. "A difficult trick."

"I think you're painting a much too black picture of yourself, Mr. Dunbar," said Sawyer. She had to say something; she had no idea why he was confiding in her.

"Do you, Miss Bolton? Well, there was a redeeming side to young Dunbar, to be fair." He stared distantly, as if visualising himself as an undergraduate. "There was inside him a sophomoric resentment against the injustices of society—and he had a yearning to set the world aright. And so, he began going around to the rooms of the wild-eyed young radicals to attend their little meetings. He joined them in crying out against the trusts, the sweatshops, the long hours and low pay, the Wall Street manipulations, the corrupt political machines—oh, you should have heard him. Rallies, petitions, protests. He thought he had found his real self."

"Hadden't he? What do you think of that side of him now?"

"He was a misguided fool. Oh, he found out! In all the world there is no greater fool than the crusader—the stupid altruist! He's invariably used as a dupe." He tugged at his left ear and smiled ruefully. "But none of this interests you, does it?"

"Oh, it interests me very much," she lied.

"Does it?" he asked. "I mean—" He spread his hands. "Oh well. But somehow, Miss Bolton, I didn't want you to think I—"

"I think you're very nice."

She was flattered that he had chosen her to hear his troubled self-revelation. Still, he disturbed her; he was fumbling to say something which was of importance to him, and she was very much afraid that she knew what it was. If he should go ahead and tell her about the horror on Luzon—and it seemed to her that he was losing a struggle against telling her of it—she would be utterly dismayed and without words to respond. No one had ever addressed her with such respect, but . . . she wished Martha would come and take him away. She knew what it was like to

have black shadows tormenting one, but why should he have to single out her to talk with about his? Why not Martha? Unless— Could it be that she had attracted him so much? Vain to think that, possibly, but before dinner he *had* looked at her several times. If just once more, suppose she should—

She turned her head toward him and saw him looking directly at her and she gazed into his eyes.

"Miss Bolton!" he said. "May I tell you that I think you—" The dance ended, the McCraes and their partners were approaching. He got to his feet. "Perhaps later we can talk some more?"

"I do hope so," said Sawyer.

In the next dance Allen took Mrs. McCrae for his partner, and another young man claimed Martha. Judge McCrae elected to sit the dance out with Sawyer. But he soon became engrossed in conversation with a trio of men about his own age on the other side of him.

"My Cinderella! I've been looking everywhere!"

He had come. She saw his black pumps, his black trousers as far as his knees. She could lift her eyes no farther. Her heart raced, her throat became dry, she clenched her hands. Don't be foolish, she told herself, don't be foolish. She saw his white-gloved hand reaching down for her kid-gloved hand. Her fingers uncurled, so that they rested in his palm, and she obediently got to her feet and faced him. In white tie he was handsomer even than she had remembered. To-night the long-lashed brown eyes were smiling gravely. Hardly before she was aware of it, she was in his arms, gliding across the floor to the strains of *After the Ball*, music which would haunt her forever.

He led her firmly. Though Sawyer had never danced in a ballroom, Martha had once taught her the steps of the waltz in anticipation of the spring german which she had not been in school to attend. She had made use of the instruction, however: often in her room at home she had broken a spell of melancholy by dancing about on the figured carpet, pretending to be in the arms of a handsome prince at a royal ball. That had been dreaming and this was reality; but now the reality seemed even more dreamlike than her imagining had been. At first she thought only of her feet, and she was filled with a trembling which seemed to rob her of co-ordination, but hardly before she knew, she no longer had feet at all: she was weightless, drifting and floating . . . Cinderella, he had called her, and it couldn't hurt to imagine it till the coachman returned at twelve—yes, Cinderella with her Fairy Prince at the Ball . . .

They were dancing on a small terrace. She had no memory of his leading her out through the open doors, or any idea of where she was until the moist air on her bare shoulders made her open her eyes and she looked at the night sky. They danced on the stones, and then, though

the music continued, they stopped. His hands lingered and left her reluctantly, and she felt alone.

"I want you to know how much this means to me," he said falteringly. "I've never known anybody like you. You're so much above me—I haven't got any right—"

"I'm nobody," she said. "Really I'm not."

"You're on top," he said. "I know what you are. And me? The eleventh child of an Irish plumber who didn't give a damn. I didn't mean to say damn. But it's like this: while you were a kid eating off gold plates I was running around with a gang, stealing, fighting in alleys, lying to the cops. Doing things I couldn't even tell you about, Sawyer."

"Tony—please."

"I want you to know. Women like you . . . I always wanted a woman like you. But I've got no business at anything like this. It's just a freak I'm here. You belong here. I've—oh, hell!" He spread his arms and let them fall in defeat.

"Tony," she said, "I think you are the finest man I ever knew. I think that, Tony."

"If you were made of marble, like a statue," he said. "I would kneel down and kiss your feet. I would say you were my God and I would lay there crying."

He took her in his arms and looked fiercely down at her. Her breath caught in her lungs, and she turned her agonised face up to him.

He kissed her, tenderly at first. Then she struggled and tore her mouth away. She had not known a kiss was like that.

"Kiss me," he whispered.

She shook her head. He lifted her face with a forefinger under her chin.

"Please don't, Tony."

"Kiss me."

She put her arms around his neck and clung to his lips until she could bear it no longer. She ended it and laid her head against his chest and he held her shuddering body close.

"Oh, Sawyer," he breathed.

"We must go in," she whispered. "Please. We must."

They swayed and began dancing once more. They danced into the ballroom, the lights blinding her, the roar rising in her ears.

And it was perhaps because those protruding eyeballs glaring from a gallery saw the exultancy with which she danced as she re-entered the ballroom that they blazed with an extreme of fury . . .

"I love you."

She thought she heard him whisper it in her ear, but she was not sure.

"Did you hear me?" He had whispered it then. "I said I love you."

"Yes. Yes, I heard you. But you mustn't . . ."

They danced on, and now the reeds and strings were echoing, "I love you, I love you." And the soft roar of conversation: all the dancers were softly saying to one another, "I love you, I love you." And all those yellow lights, they were fifteen thousand tokens of love.

But this last thought was so absurd that she laughed. Tony grinned down at her. "You're happy."

She lowered her face and felt her hair brush his lips.

So this was how love came to one. Without warning, unreasonably, in a few hours. Your life went along evenly without it, then it was there, full in your breast, and you had nothing to do with it, but you realized there had been a void that had ached to be filled with love. He appeared before you, and you didn't know at first that all your living had been for this moment; it came like a fever, slowly and hardly apparent, so that you were not prepared when it began throbbing in you hotly, until you could hardly breathe and you seemed to have no strength and you were lighter, so much lighter, and you knew you could not move without trembling.

She heard him from afar: "I notice that Dunbar fellow and the old lady he's dancing with giving us the big eye. He doesn't like us being together. Is he . . .?"

She smiled and shook her head, gratified by the implication of a rival. "He's leaving to-morrow for some kind of land opening out west."

"Oh!" They danced in a closed silence, until: "I've heard something about that land lottery. It might be held in May, I think I read in the papers."

"I believe July, Judge McCrae said."

The wonderful embracing silence, and then, a note of anxiety in his voice: "Sawyer, you would understand, wouldn't you, if I—you wouldn't think—if it was something I just had to—"

She wished he would not talk so. His anxious inflection was alien to their mood. "What on earth are you trying to say?"

"That you are beautiful."

She looked away: "Silly."

They stopped, and she saw that they were at the edge of the floor. The distinguished-looking Mr. Foster was standing there. He greeted them and she returned a "How-do-you-do." Again, she decided she liked him. She liked the little shock as the black-flecked green eyes bored into her. She wanted to say proudly, "Tony was right, Mr. Foster. I'm going to be his wife." She wanted to astound him with the announcement, to laugh happily as he congratulated them both.

She heard Tony mention that she was a guest of the McCraes, but her attention was taken by Martha's dancing by, frowning at her and shaking her head, and she did not understand what it was Tony said to

Mr. Foster or have any idea why Mr. Foster exclaimed, "What?" and clapped Tony on the back, saying, "Good work, lad."

The next moment they were dancing again. "You must believe I love you," he said, and the spell engulfed her once more. What would it be like, she wondered, to whisper, "I love you, too?"

Abruptly the music ended. She stood dazed, feeling that the melody had clothed her and now had been stripped away. How could Tony so calmly say, "Thank you?" Did it mean that he was going to leave her now?

She saw the McCraes rejoining one another, some distance away. She thrust her hand under Tony's arm and led him to them. Hastily reminding Martha and Allen Dunbar that they already knew Mr. Tyndall, she presented him to the McCraes. She kept up a bright patter to fend off comment by any of them: "What a coincidence! This is the gentleman who rescued me when I was lost, Mrs. McCrae, and so kindly found a cab for me. And how remarkable that we should meet again here at the Ball—only a few hours later. Mr. Tyndall is a member of the government, too, Judge McCrae." On and on her tongue ran, her eyes refusing to meet theirs in more than a glance. Why didn't someone say something! She would run out of words finally . . .

At last Martha broke in with a sharp: "Allen and I are going out on one of those little porches for a breath of air. Won't *you* join us, Sawyer?"

"Of course we'll go with you!" said Sawyer. "Wouldn't you like to, Mr. Tyndall?"

The four of them stood at the stone balustrade of the small terrace. Sawyer and Tony talked to each other animatedly. Martha forced an occasional remark. Allen stood silent, drumming the rail, looking out into the garden.

All of them seemed to hear at one time the laboured breathing behind them. They turned to see Bolton standing in the doorway between them and the ballroom.

"Why, Papa!" said Sawyer.

Bolton did not move for a moment; then, he took one strained step toward her.

"Wait." Her voice low, her inflection was a command; he halted in spite of himself. "I know what you intend to say. You mustn't." She felt Tony's sleeve brush against her bare arm. She lifted her head and said, "You must go now."

Bolton raised an arm and advanced on her, crying weakly, "God damn you!"

Sawyer saw the blow fall on Allen's face; he had stepped in front of her. Then, Allen's hands on her father's shoulders, pushing him against the wall seemingly without application of force.

"Don't hurt him," she begged.

"Sawyer!"

She turned. Tony was standing just below, outside the balustrade. She leaned over and he lifted her and set her down beside him. He grasped her arm and led her rapidly through the garden. In the darkness branches slapped her face, but Tony did not stop until they had reached a place where a distant street lamp, throwing a gleam into the garden, sparkled the raindrops on the black limbs.

He seized her shoulders roughly and faced her to him. "Why did he—your dad, was he?—why did he do that?"

"I don't know."

"I'll never let anything like that happen to you again." He put his arms around her. When he took his mouth from hers, she began crying. "Don't," he pleaded. "Please don't. Sawyer, listen. Marry me. Now—to-night. There are preachers. We can get a licence at any clerk's house. We can be married in an hour."

"No, no. I can't do that."

"Why? You love me. Say you do." He shook her shoulders. "Say it!"

"Oh, I think I do love you, Tony."

He kissed her.

"But people . . ." she protested. "What would they say?"

"What people?"

She didn't know. What people? Her father? Never again would he matter. The McCraes? Theirs was the only house she could go to now. They would understand, surely, but she couldn't stay there forever. There was only one other person to consider. She looked up and her lips moved entreatingly: "Mother . . ."

"Listen!"

Somewhere hoofs clomped against the pavement.

"Sounds like a hansom coming," said Tony. "We can grab it. Come on!"

"No, wait." She pushed against his embrace.

The clomp-clomp grew louder . . .

"Hurry, Sawyer, or it'll be too late!"

"I don't know. I—"

"You don't have to, darling. Our cards are being played for us."

His arm around her, together they ran and stumbled and ran again toward the hoofbeats.

CHAPTER SIX

SAWYER lay with her head deep in her pillow. She had been dreaming it was summer, she was twelve years old and embroidering a red velvet pincushion shaped like a heart, while the Negro vegetable huckster passed down the street outside, calling "Tomatoes, onions, beans, cabbages, all kinds uh fresh truck." Gradually, it stole into her consciousness that it was a boy she heard shouting, and he was selling newspapers. Newsboys never sold in Blount Street in Raleigh. Uneasily she rolled on her back. Her eyes opened. Where was her organdi canopy? This greyed ceiling, with the long zig-zag line in the morning-lighted plaster . . .

Then she remembered. She closed her eyes blissfully. She sank into sleep again.

" . . . Washington's rather nice. I don't think I'd mind living here . . . "

After a while she drifted up to consciousness. Who had said that? Oh yes. The words could be her own, though. It *was* going to be nice in Washington . . .

You must learn . . . She half woke again. Yes, she must learn the duties of a Congressman's secretary's wife. That was the first thing to be planned. She must be a help to Tony. Who could tell, in time he might be promoted to Congressman. Oh, undoubtedly he would, he was so bright and clever and likeable. The functions they would attend, the parties she would give. She would be poised and confident and dignified . . .

She was willing to be dignified if she could do it just lying here in weightless enervation forever. No morning for planning. A morning for languor, to lie stretched and surrendered to lassitude.

Facing the outside of the bed now and a window next to her, she reached out an arm and lifted the side of the drawn window shade, the movement making pinpoints of light dance along its web of cracks. The morning was late, a bright March sun had climbed high. She sank back.

What heights might Tony and she reach! Why, in time Tony could even become President. She shook away that thought. To be President Tony would have to be an old man, and she wanted him to stay always as he was.

She wanted to sleep . . .

She struggled for wakefulness, the fighting to be free of the satisfying drowsiness painful. All these thoughts, they were a delaying game, she knew, till she could summon courage for the shock of seeing a man lying beside her. She smiled wanly. She wanted the shock of looking at her husband lying beside her. Sooner or later she would do it. Better now with him asleep; she could never look at him if he were looking back at

her. He was awake already! She was sure of it. Lying with his head on one side, his brown eyes on her. Ah well. She let her head fall on her pillow toward his.

Only an empty dent in his pillow.

She sat upright, her hair falling across her shoulders and down the back of her chemise.

He was not in the room.

Her yellow dress and petticoats and stockings were draped over the arm of the chair, but his dress suit, which he had hung over the back, had vanished. His derby and the brown suit which she had seen hanging on the clothes tree by the door when they came in were gone.

Terrified, she threw back the covers, her heart crying, "Please, Tony, please!"

The door burst open and banged against the wall. A man staggered in. She could see him only from the waist down. The remainder of him was hidden behind an armload of paper boxes, long and square, yellow, white and brown. She pulled the covers to her throat and shrieked. The boxes clattered to the floor. The man gaped at her in astonishment.

It was Tony.

Her laugh of relief was almost hysterical.

"Good morning, my beautiful wife!" he shouted.

He closed the door, threw his derby to one side, it struck the wall and rolled under the washstand, and in an instant he was sitting on the bed beside her, embracing her. His bristly chin rasped her shoulders, but she held him close.

"I was afraid, when I awoke and you were gone."

"Don't you know I would never leave you, my darling? Now I've found you at last . . .?"

She held his face in her hands and looked into it searchingly. His brown eyes gazed unwaveringly into hers. She could read his adoration. He had not stopped loving her. The smile playing at the corners of his mouth was a proud smile. Yes, he was proud of her, still glad that he was her husband.

A tear came into her eye. His brow knitted in quick concern. She shook her head to tell him the tear was not unhappiness; she kissed his brow smooth. "Oh Tony, my love. You'll always be gentle with me, won't you, my Tony?"

He stroked her hair. "Always."

She drew his head to her breast . . .

The boxes, it turned out, were full of clothing for her. He said he had searched three stores finding what he wanted. He piled the boxes on the bed before her.

"Oh, what sweet shoes!" They were much too lavishly ornamented

and too small, but she clasped them to herself. She would wear them if they killed her.

"Look!" said Tony, triumphantly lifting a box top. He took out a mammoth green hat with rolling brim and white ostrich plumes sweeping around the crown. Sawyer clapped her hands. "I never saw such a wonderful hat."

"And here's the dress to go with it."

She regarded the apple green suit with black stripes and tilted her head dubiously. "Isn't it a little—gay?"

His expression was agonized.

She laughed. "It's perfect! But how did you know my sizes?"

"Oh, I just told them for a figure that's scrumdiddliumptious. And that you were nineteen."

"Now what would age have to do with size? And how, Mr. Tyndall, did you think of the nineteen?"

"You had to give your age to the deputy clerk, didn't you, when we got him up for the licence? Remember him?"

They both laughed at the recollection of the crochety clerk in flannel nightgown and peaked nightcap as he came to the door holding a lamp high above his head.

"Well, Mr. Smarty, you might as well know the truth. It's not nineteen. I'm seventeen."

"Seventeen! My God. Sweetheart!" He sat on the bed beside her and stared. "Why, you're only a child."

"You think so?"

He looked into her worried gray eyes and burst out laughing. "No, you're not a child," he said. "My God, no. Not now, anyway."

She blushed and turned away her head and he had to pull her chin around to kiss her. "My little child wife," he laughed.

"Oh, you're not so old! You're only twenty-three."

"Babes in the woods, that's us. Now are you going to get dressed, or do you want me to get undressed?"

"Tony! Stop talking like that!" He laughed and got up. She looked over the boxes. "The things you got are perfect—that is—if only you—"

"Sure. It's all there in the boxes. Unde——"

"I know," she said hastily. "But how did you have the courage?"

"Me? I've got more brass than a foundry, sweetheart." He took a gold-trimmed mug, strop, and razor case from the washstand. "I'll go down to the end of the hall and shave while you get dressed."

She smiled gratefully. She had wondered how she would ever get out of bed.

At the door he turned. "Oh, I went to the auditorium to get your wrap. I found the check in your little bag."

She had forgotten the wrap.

"I had to go get my topper too. But your wrap was gone. The McCraes took it, I guess."

"It was Martha's. I'm glad we sent them the note. I'll have to take Martha's gown back and get my things."

Whistling, he left the room. She got out of bed and turned the key and poured water from the pitcher into the bowl. The cold water felt tingly and good on her skin.

Then, shyly admiring each undergarment he had brought, she began dressing. She stepped into the flaring bell skirt of the suit. As she made the waist an inch smaller with a safety pin, she uncertainly regarded the striped apple green in the mirror. She slipped on the mutton-sleeve jacket over her shirtwaist, and, turning this way and that, studied its reflection. Well, it wasn't exactly what she would have bought for herself. But heavens, you couldn't expect a husband to have perfect taste in picking out women's clothing; and anyway, if it pleased him to see her in it, what else mattered? There probably *wasn't* anything wrong with it: she was so used to wearing silly little girl's dresses, and this at least was attire for a mature and experienced woman.

When Tony returned and tried the knob, he begged to be let in, but she kept him out until she had put on the great hat and thrust two sparkling glass-knobbed pins through it to hold it steady. She went to the door, craftily turned the key, and stood back in the centre of the room and invited him to enter.

He opened the door and stopped on the threshold. His chin dropped with exaggerated astonishment.

"Jesus!" he exclaimed. "I never saw a woman look such a peacharino in her get-up. And I've seen 'em all, sweetheart."

"Well," said Sawyer with playful severity, "you're not to see any of them from now on."

He put his shaving things on the washstand and came to her and took her in his arms. He smelled wonderfully of violet water. His cheeks were smooth but when he kissed her his upper lip rasped hers.

"Tony!" You didn't shave up here."

He winked at her. "You wanted me to have a moustache, I'll have a moustache."

She winked back at him and they both laughed.

She returned to the mirror. She wasn't satisfied with the angle of the hat. While she tried to get it right, he stood around with his hands in his pockets. "You might put Martha's gown in one of those boxes while you're waiting," she said.

He folded the yellow satin into a box. "'Married in yellow, ashamed of your fellow.' Ever hear that?"

"Don't you believe it."

"Atta girl. What's this thing?" He held up the hip pad.

"You just put that in the box."

"Hon, this is one doodad you don't need."

"You just be still. Well, I'm ready."

"Want me to go with you?"

"Oh, but you must go to your office, mustn't you? You'll be late now."

"Sawyer—" He hesitated. "Well, as a matter of fact, I've got an important meeting with some men down the hall, but—"

"You attend to business," she said firmly. Her wifely tone pleased her. "I'll get along all right."

He snapped his fingers. "Breakfast! You haven't had a bite to eat. We've got to have our first breakfast together—even if I'm late."

"No," said Sawyer briskly. "Business first. I can eat with Martha. She always eats late, and we'll have plenty to talk about."

He pulled out a wad of currency and smoothed out five one-dollar bills. "You'll need some dough for your cab."

She folded and tucked the money under her glove, while Tony put on his derby and flipped the left side of the brim with a forefinger to give it the correct jaunty tilt. At the door she put a hand on his arm. "Tony."

"Yes."

"I just want you to know I'm very happy, very happy to be your wife." He stroked the curve of her chin. "Call me Mrs. Tyndall once," she begged. "I want to hear it."

"How do you do, Mrs. Tyndall?"

"Very well, thank you, Mr. Tyndall."

They strode down the hall, Sawyer lengthening her steps to match his stride. As they neared the head of the stairs, a heavy-set man with pink slablike cheeks came up, puffing from the exertion.

"Mornin', Rev," said Tony cheerily.

The pink-cheeked man nodded curtly and opened the first door on his left and went in.

Sawyer glimpsed a number of men inside, sitting about in layers of cigar smoke. Standing by the washstand was Mr. Foster.

"Be right back," Tony called.

"Wait a minute," said Foster. He came out into the hall. "I want to kiss the bride."

He lifted her face with his hand and kissed her on the mouth. Sawyer had expected him only to brush her cheek; the kiss startled her. She glanced at Tony; he was frowning—it secretly pleased her that he didn't approve.

"If this scamp doesn't treat you right," said Foster, "you come and tell me."

"I'm not worried," laughed Sawyer, and took Tony's arm.

They went down the stairs, through the lobby, and out to a carriage stand.

"Sure you'll be all right?" asked Tony as he helped her into a victoria. She nodded. "Then good-bye for a little while."

After the carriage started Sawyer remembered that yesterday she had looked back from a carriage and he had vanished. But it had been raining then; the sun shone now, and she was happy and safe and secure. Confidently, she looked back. He had not vanished. He stood by the curb looking after her.

The Pennsylvania Avenue along which Sawyer was driven at a brisk clip had returned to its normal flow of carriages and drays. They passed the reviewing court. The empty stands looked out of place. The Greek urns had burnt out. The searchlights had disappeared. Workmen were unscrewing light bulbs and taking down the wires. And behind the windows of the government buildings clerks and typewriters had resumed their dreary paper work on behalf of their seventy-six million employers in the forty-five United States.

As the victoria turned up the McCraes' street, Sawyer had a premonition that her father lurked in hiding. She had become definitely uneasy by the time she stepped down in front of the McCrae mansion and told the driver to go round to the tradesmen's entrance to wait for her trunk.

Going up the walk, she reasoned that even if her father was inside Judge McCrae and Allen Dunbar would protect her. Having rung the bell, however, it occurred to her that neither man might be in the house at this time of day. Judge McCrae likely would be at his office; Dunbar perhaps had already left for Philadelphia. She was planning how she would handle him unaided when the door was thrown open.

Samson stood there.

The butler stared at her. Then, turning and raising his voice, he shouted down the hall, "Great day in the mornin'. Miss Bolton's here. She done been saved!"

He recovered his composure and stepped nimbly aside to let her enter.

Sawyer's eyes struggled to adjust themselves to the shadowy interior. Bearing down on her, uttering hysterical exclamations, was Martha. She threw her arms around Sawyer's neck, weeping as if she herself were the one who had returned from the dead. Over Martha's shoulders Sawyer saw Judge and Mrs. McCrae standing by the velvet draperies of the drawing-room entrance. Relief was the Judge's expression; Mrs. McCrae's face was immobile. Then Sawyer became aware of Allen Dunbar, stopped halfway down the curving stairs, a hand on the rail. Evidently, he had just been descending when Sawyer entered. He looked grave.

Martha held Sawyer at arm's length. "Sawyer! Your clothes! They're different!"

"What's the matter with them?" asked Sawyer defensively.

"Why, nothing, I suppose, but— Wait till we can sit down. We've been so upset here, and I can't even *imagine* what you've been through!"

Sawyer whispered, "To heaven and back."

"What?"

"Samson, hot tea," commanded Mrs. McCrae. "And brandy."

"My dear girl," said Judge McCrae, "we're so glad you're safe." To the others, he said, "I'll telephone the police she's here and safe."

"The police? You've had the police looking for me?"

"Just quietly," said Mrs. McCrae.

"But didn't you get my note?"

"Was it really yours?" asked Martha. "Some cabby brought it long after midnight and went away before we could read it."

"But then——?"

"It said you were all right and not to worry and it was signed with your name. But it wasn't your handwriting—I know your writing. It alarmed us more than ever."

"Tony wrote it for me. I was too nervous."

Mrs. McCrae's eyebrows lifted. "Tony?" she inquired. "You mean Mr. Tyndall?" And added, "Let's go into the drawing-room."

Dunbar came on down and hesitated at the opening.

"Come in, Allen," said Mrs. McCrae. "We shall all want to know of Sawyer's adventure, and you're practically a member of the family now."

Sawyer glanced questioningly at Martha.

"Allen and I are engaged!" exclaimed Martha. "We weren't going to announce it yet, but I want you to know."

"I'm so glad," said Sawyer. "And my warmest congratulations, Mr. Dunbar."

"Thank you."

"Well, we finally came home when we couldn't find you anywhere," said Martha, sitting on a sofa with her mother, opposite the armchair she indicated for Sawyer. Allen sank into an easy chair at a distance. "This morning, your father appeared. When we had to tell him you weren't here, he didn't believe it, and he insisted on looking in every room."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"He flew into a rage," said Martha melodramatically, "and stormed off and swore he would never let you cross his threshold again."

"It's all right, said Sawyer. "I never expect to see him again."

"My dear," said Mrs. McCrae.

"And then," Martha went on breathlessly, "when Allen remembered

that that Tyndall fellow had claimed to be connected with Congressman Fischer. Father telephoned him. But the Congressman said he had never heard of the fellow."

"Ridiculous," said Sawyer. "Tony's his secretary."

Judge McCrae came in clasping his hands before himself. "Now then, Sawyer, if there's a single thing you want me to do——"

"There's nothing," said Sawyer. "I apologise for causing you so much concern. I'm sure I was thoughtless."

She had begun to be uneasy. There was a growing antagonism in their manner. She wished Mrs. McCrae would stop looking at her with such disapproval. The woman had taken in her attire, and her grimace confirmed Sawyer's fear that the apple green suit was in poor taste. Sawyer had been sure of the hat, at least, but at this moment Mrs. McCrae was regarding it with distaste, also. The suit was cheap, she knew now, the flamboyant hat something an actress would wear. Oh, why had Tony let a sales-person talk him into taking them. She had pictured herself sweeping in triumphantly, she hadn't counted on Mrs. McCrae's stare.

"Allen tells us," said Mrs. McCrae severely, "that he was dubious about Mr. Tyndall from the first."

"What Allen said was," interposed Martha, "he knew he was a crook from the moment he laid eyes on him."

"I could easily have been mistaken," said Allen, "and probably I was."

"But Allen, you said yourself——"

"Yes. However——"

He paused, his flicker of a glance into Sawyer's eyes indicating the next move might be hers if she wished to make it.

"He's my husband, Martha."

There was a long silence. Sawyer felt her hands doubling into tight fists. It wasn't going right. But why? Why? She had known it would be a surprise; she had anticipated their surprise with a smug pleasure. But this silence, it was more than the silence of surprise.

Mrs. McCrae finally was about to say something.

"I believe, Judge, I'll have a swallow of that brandy now."

Judge McCrae splashed a little in a glass, and handed it to his wife. Sawyer glanced at Martha. Martha was staring at her, not comprehending. Then disbelief came, and began to give way to horror. Sawyer hated the expression she saw taking possession of Martha's face. She despised Martha. She despised every one of these people. She glanced at Allen Dunbar. He was gazing impassively out of a window. A white cloud hung motionless out there. She would have to speak; she must say some words.

"I'm sorry you have such a bad impression of my husband."

That wasn't the right word—"sorry." She wasn't sorry about anything. This was the most wonderful morning of her life. These people were

spoiling it. "Just now, I begin to see, I'm not going to be welcome here." This was their chance: they could deny she wasn't welcome.

Still they said nothing.

"I've been unconventional. Is that it? That's worse than anything, isn't it? But couldn't there have been circumstances which—? I had hoped you had seen enough of what life with my father was like to—there is such a thing as—" She could never make it clear to them; she had not come prepared to defend herself. Why plead with them? She did not have to submit to the judgment of people like them. Only Tony's opinion of her mattered now. They were cardboard figures; she was the only real person present; she was talking aloud in an empty room. Why was she in this room at all? She felt as fidgety as she used to get as a child when she went with her father to someone's office and he and the other man sat and talked and talked and she itched to be going, to get out into the sun and air again, moving, yet they droned on and on. She could sit here no longer.

She rose. "At any rate," she said, "I've come to return Martha's gown and get my things."

"Martha," said Mrs. McCrae, "go with Sawyer and help her."

Instead Martha twisted round on the sofa and sobbed into its back.

"Samson," called Mrs. McCrae, as if aware that he was listening from the hall, "have one of the maids help Miss Sawyer pack."

Sawyer starting for the hall, turned. "You've been kind, Mrs. McCrae."

"Your affairs are your own business," said Mrs. McCrae. "Certainly none of ours. I hope you will be happy. Judge, will you walk on the terrace with me? I feel the need of air. Martha, you had better come too."

Upstairs, Sawyer couldn't throw her things into her trunks and valise fast enough. The maid stood helpless before such speed. When Samson asked her if the trunk was ready to be closed, he added, "Madam." She was grateful for that. A few moments before, letting her into the house, he had said "Miss." At least *he* was willing to accept her new status.

With dignity she took out her money and gave Samson and the maid each a dollar and thanked them for their kindness while she had been there. In a way it was more than she could afford to give, perhaps, but in another way she wished it were more. For even the maid curtsied now and said, "Thank you, madam."

The deference of the servants composed her, so that she was able to come down the stairs with an appearance of serenity. As she went by the drawing-room archway, she glanced in, hoping the room would be empty so she could get out without further words. Allen Dunbar stood by a pedestal, a forefinger tracing the broken stump of the Venus of Milo's left arm.

He came out to her.

"I didn't have a chance to extend my best wishes," he said.

"I hope," said Sawyer coolly, "you're satisfied with the estimation of my husband's character you gave the McCraes."

"I'm genuinely sorry for that. It was pretty poor sportsmanship on my part—that is, I'm a notoriously poor judge of character. May I say that under the circumstances I think you showed a lot of spunk?"

His friendliness caught her off her guard.

He took a crumpled lace handkerchief from his pocket. "When you stood in the garden last night—before you ran for the cab—you dropped this."

"Thank you. I didn't know you were there."

"Martha sent me to look for you. I—decided not to interrupt."

"But didn't you tell Martha about what you saw—when you got back?"

"No." He hesitated. "That's not what I did." He said, "I wish you every happiness, Mrs. Tyndall."

An inexplicable shadow of melancholy drifted in Sawyer's breast; she took a breath and it was gone. "I'm sure you and Martha will be happy, too," she said.

"We're sure to be . . . and thank you." He opened the front door.

She turned on the threshold. "Since we're not likely to see each other again . . . I'm sorry, Mr. Dunbar, that I won't have the chance to prove to you that your first impression of Tony was wrong."

"You wouldn't have to," he smiled. "A woman's intuition can always be trusted."

Then he said "Good luck" and "Au revoir," and she took her eyes from his and went out to her waiting cab.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE cabby followed Sawyer down the hotel corridor carrying her trunk on his back. When she reached the door of No. 227 she heard Tony inside singing in a sweet tenor voice, *Oh, the moonlight's fair to-night along the Wabash . . .*

He answered her knock. "Hey, you don't have to knock here." He put an arm around her shoulders and brought her into the room. "This is your home. Remember?" He indicated where the cabby should put the trunk and tipped him fifty cents. "Well," he said, closing the door, "how did it go at the McCraes?"

"Not very well."

"Oh. Showed their true colours, did they?"

"Well—" She took off her hat before the mirror. Without turning she said, "Tony, you really are Congressman Fischer's secretary." There was a silence. "Aren't you?" She saw his reflection as he stood in the middle of the room, studying her carefully.

"Why do you ask that?"

"Tony, the McCraes said you're not."

"Wisenheimers, aren't they?"

"What?"

"I supposed you knew all along why I said I was."

She felt her hands shaking and she put down her hat. "I didn't know. Why did you?"

"At the Inaugural? If you remember, that Dunbar fellow was looking down his long nose at me. I'd have said anything just then that would have helped me stay there where you were."

She smiled a little. How terrible it would have been if he hadn't contrived some way to stay. "I don't mind the fib. But why didn't you just say what you really— What do you do, darling?"

"Look, sweet. I came to Washington because Congressman Fischer, who is an old friend of the family, had as good as promised me the job. But he double-crossed me and hired somebody else."

"Judge McCrae said Congressman Fischer told him he'd never heard of you before."

"The McCraes, the McCraes!" He waved his arms angrily. She was surprised at his quick temper. "Are you going to believe them or me?"

"You."

"Of course Fischer said he'd never heard of me. He's sore. We had a row, see, and they practically had to carry me out of his office. It was a great disappointment, see, because I'd counted on it so much."

"Oh, darling Tony, I know it must have hurt you. I wish I had known, so I could have told the McCraes."

"Forget them."

"But don't you worry about that old job. Why, there are a hundred better things you can do."

"Sure, sweetheart. And don't *you* worry. I've got a deal that'll make that job look small beer. Whatever you haven't already got in your trunk, throw it in. I'm about finished."

For the first time she realised that when she came in he had been packing.

"Where are we going?"

"Out west. St. Louis first."

"West? But——"

"Look, Mrs. Tyndall." He came to her and put a hand on each of her shoulders. "You've got a husband now. All you have to do is be sweet and beautiful."

"I wouldn't be anything without you, Tony. Not anything."

"The two of us—that's everything. And we're starting west in three hours. I've already got the tickets. Your husband's going to start working for you."

She laughed. "And I'm not going to be the kind of wife who interferes in her husband's affairs. You decide where you want us to live—I don't care where so long as we're together!"

"That's the way to talk," he said.

She opened her trunk and began gathering up her few things. She pulled out the upper right-hand drawer of the washstand. It was empty.

Frantically, she reached in and felt around. She searched through the other drawers. They were empty.

"Tony!"

"Yes?"

"My necklace and earrings."

"What about them?"

"They're gone!"

"Where did you put them?"

"Here. In this drawer. But there's nothing here."

"Sure you put them there?"

"Yes. But oh, I shouldn't have left them. While we were gone—somebody stole them."

"I don't think so."

She turned very slowly and stood very straight and still, gripping the edges of the marble top behind her. It seemed an age before he spoke.

"It's all right," he said. He was smiling. "Nothing to worry about."

"Yes?"

"I took them."

"Where are they?"

"They're perfectly safe. You can have them back any time you want them."

She sighed; her arms dropped to her sides. "Oh Tony, you gave me such a fright."

He grinned. "I just wanted to scare you."

"Where are they, dear?"

"Well, I'll tell you. You were asleep and I didn't see any point in waking you up——"

"Yes?"

"I remembered you put them away last night. I've got some pressure on me, see? Well, you are my wife now, aren't you? I mean whatever's mine belongs to you, and whatever——"

"Where are they, Tony. Tell me——"

"I'm trying to!" His eyes blazed, then he shrugged. "Oh well." From his vest pocket he took two paper stubs. "Here you are."

She took them. The numbers 3,041 and 3,042 were pencilled on them. At the top was printed "Uncle Joe's Pawnshop" and the address.

Her hands began trembling again.

"Now, sweet."

"Oh Tony."

"They're perfectly safe."

"They were my mother's."

"You can have them back any——"

"Why did you do it?"

"I had to have the dough!" Then, more gently: "You remember last night when the preacher guy said, 'For richer or for poorer?' Well, this is one of the 'for poorer' days, sweet. But not for long. Just leave it to me."

She turned away.

"Look. You had to have clothes and——"

"You mean these clothes—it was money from——"

"You had to have something to wear, didn't you? I thought I was being thoughtful."

"And the five dollars you gave me. You'd already pawned them and——"

"I bought the railroad tickets too. We're all set now."

She sank to the edge of the bed, holding her handkerchief to her mouth to fight back the tears.

"I don't get you. You're making a mountain out of this. The gems aren't gone. It was just that I had to get those railroad tickets, understand? *Had* to. It was as much for you as for me. I'm the head of a

family now. I can't function without money. Suppose I had to tell you on the first day of our marriage. 'Look, I'm broke. I can't even buy us a meal?' What kind of a husband would that be?"

"But you didn't even ask me."

She twisted sideways and buried her head in the pillow to muffle her sobs. It wasn't only the jewellery. It was something worse. Tony himself was different, he was changing from the way he had been. It showed itself in the way he talked, his tone, the words he used. It was as if he were putting on a mask, or taking one off.

"For God's sake, listen." He stood over her. "There's nothing to hocking. I've done it a hundred times. Everybody does. It's just temporary. I didn't want to wake you up to tell you I was borrowing them temporarily. If I'd had any idea you wouldn't want to help your husband out of a tight place I wouldn't have touched them with a ten-foot pole."

"I *do* want to help. It's not that."

"Do you think I'd be satisfied to keep you in a crummy hotel room like this? You're not going to turn against me just because I need a few dollars for us to get started."

He knelt beside her and kissed the nape of her neck and behind her ears.

"Listen. You're not going to be against me the very first day, when I was doing something just for you." He whispered in her ear, "Do I look like the kind of guy who'd let his wife end up in the poorhouse?"

He turned her over. There was nothing she could say. He had made it seem she was in the wrong to object. Maybe she was. It was too mixed up. Perhaps he was right, but— He kissed her wet cheeks and pressed his mouth against hers and put his hands on her body. She lay with eyes closed and accepted his caresses passively.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE Lottery Specials, each made up of six coaches, sped across Kansas an hour apart all the hot July day long. Their destination was El Reno, Oklahoma Territory, end of the line and site of the lottery drawing.

Each train looked as if giant bees had swarmed on it. Men stood on the cowcatcher, sprawled on the tender, huddled on the roofs of the coaches. Wherever a foothold and handhold could be obtained, there clung a man.

Overcrowded though they were, those who had got on the passenger trains were luckier than those travelling on trains of coal gondolas made up specially to help transport the multitude of landseekers. Even the freight trains had hundreds of men riding the rods and the roofs.

Kansas farmers threshing their wheat and cultivating their corn beneath the July sun looked up each time a train passed. Waving arms were extended from the open windows of the passenger trains and men riding the engine and roofs shouted and waved hats.

Sometimes a sweating farmer would wave back, and his eyes would follow the train until it disappeared. His face would express the wish that he had had the courage of a neighbour who had pulled stakes for the "new chance" in the Kiowa-Comanche country. Another time, a farmer would shake his head doubtfully at the train and return to his task, knowing as he did what lay ahead of those folks with the holiday air: the hardship and frustration of subduing a new land.

On the platform of the dépôt at Topeka, capital of Kansas, a crowd of landseekers waited, hot and impatient, for a Lottery Special that would stop for them. Sawyer, clinging with one hand to her small grip, was jostled in the shifting crowd of men as she tried to keep her straw sailor on and straighten her wrinkled skirt. Tony, dishevelled and unshaven, stood glumly beside her with his hands in his pockets.

Somebody shouted that he heard a train whistle, and presently the train itself came in sight. The crowd on the platform eddied in a flurry of baggage being picked up, good-byes being said, and a pushing for a favourable position to get aboard.

"Off the tracks! Off the tracks!" cried men riding the cowcatcher as the train headed into the station. The slowing engine's smoke swooped ahead and twisted through the crowd. The engineer blew short blasts on the whistle; then, left hand holding the throttle barely open, he leaned out of the cab. His gauntleted right hand warned back the sea of upturned faces. The crowd surged back, the notion being current that if one stood

too close to a moving train suction would pull one under the wheels.

"You'd better stop this one!" cried someone, and several men shook fists at the imperturbable engineer.

"Two trains have passed us already and we don't like it!"

"We could all get together and lift her right off the rails!"

As the train continued to slide through the station and it became evident that it would not stop, men began fighting to get on the steps of the passing coaches. Those ensconced there kicked at the eager hands. "Get a horse!" cried one of the passengers riding on top of the train, and another shouted, "There's a cattle train behind us—you'll feel at home there."

A current of the crowd pressed Sawyer against the side of a moving coach. Terrified, she pushed herself away from it.

"Tony!" she cried.

"Oh, for Christ's sake," said Tony. "Stop bellyaching."

"Hey!" shouted a rawboned man next to Sawyer. "Let's git the lady aboard nohow! Boost her in a window. Come on ever'body!"

She tried to pull loose, but three or four guffawing men grabbed her and lifted her into the air. Still holding desperately to her grip, she doubled over a windowsill and fell inside. Cursing, Tony seized the sill of the next window and struggled to pull himself up.

Sawyer could hear men laughing around her, but she could see nothing. Her skirt and petticoat were over her head. She fought to get herself free. At last, her straw hat awry, wisps of hair in her eyes, she was able to glare up at the raucous men packing the aisle.

"Be still!" she cried out.

The men roared with laughter.

Furious, she got to her knees and then to her feet. She saw Tony rising from the floor further back in the car.

Tony scowled at the laughing farmers. "Close your traps, you rube bastards," he said viciously. "The lady's my wife."

The laughter ceased.

"Can I be of help?"

Sawyer stood motionless for a second. She knew that calm voice. She turned around. Allen Dunbar was pushing up the crowded aisle toward her.

"But—you—?" She was too dumbfounded to complete her sentence.

He got to her side. "Some of my family are near the front of the car. Please come and take my seat."

"Thank you," said Sawyer with what dignity she could manage, "but I'm quite comfortable here."

Tony made his way to her and nudged her in the back. "Go ahead and take it," he said.

Allen led the way up the aisle. "Here we are," he said. In the double seats he indicated sat two men and a boy. "May I present my father, Mr. Overton Dunbar, and my brother-in-law, George Potter, and this is my youngest brother, Tad. Mr. and Mrs. Tyndall." How-do-you-do's were exchanged. "I've another younger brother on the train," said Allen, "but he was determined to ride on the roof." He indicated to Sawyer the space beside George Potter, which he had vacated. "Please sit down."

Sawyer sank carefully to the stiff red plush. It hurt to sit down. She could have wept with anger and misery.

"Mrs. Tyndall," Allen was going on calmly to his father, "is a friend of Martha's, where we met last spring."

"Oh, said Mr. Dunbar, in a gravelly voice. "Is this the young woman?"

What, wondered Sawyer, had Allen Dunbar told his father. He might have said, "There was a lovely young friend of Martha's visiting at the same time as I, who had endured a good deal at home, but thank God she found courage to escape it and marry a man who came to her protection." But he would have been as justified in saying: "Odd thing happened in Washington. Girl who somehow was a guest of the McCraes got acquainted with a gambler in the afternoon and eloped with him that night. The McCraes were stunned, the dears."

God, thought Sawyer, of all people to meet!

"How is Martha?" she asked hesitantly.

"Quite well, thank you. I heard from her last week."

. . . Martha in the voluminous red-flowered gown seated beside Allen on the small sofa in the McCraes' drawing room. And herself, serene and poised on the needlepoint chair, the cosy fire highlighting the rich yellow satin falling gracefully about her, a glass of sherry held lightly in her hand. "Enchanting, enchanting," the Judge had said . . .

Just four months ago.

She glanced down at her hands. The tight kid gloves were soiled. Beneath them, she knew, her knuckles were grimy, her nails unclean. Her tan linen skirt and jacket—how anxiously she had washed and ironed them in the rooming-house kitchen in Kansas City the day before—were criss-crossed with wrinkles, and the skirt was grime-streaked where it had dragged across the car windowsill. Her blouse cuffs, once starched and white, were limp and dirty. She tried to pull her jacket sleeves down over them. When she reached up to push back the wisps of hair and to straighten her hat, she discovered a small chunk of woven straw had been knocked from the brim. Her corset was twisted; it would not be possible to straighten it without standing. Perspiration trickled disgustingly

from her armpits. She hurt in a half-a-dozen places, and each hurt, she knew, would become a blue-black bruise. There must be thin black lines across her throat, as on the throat of that boy Tad sitting opposite her intent on his bent-nail puzzle. She wiped her wadded handkerchief under her chin; it came away a damp grey. Casually as possible, she stretched the handkerchief over a forefinger, wet it with the tip of her tongue, and dabbed at places on her cheek and chin she *felt* were dirty. She shifted the handkerchief to a clean place and touched it to her tongue again. From the corners of her eyes she saw Allen Dunbar looking down at her. She dropped her hand to her lap. He looked away quickly. Why did he have to spy on her! Standing there in his neat blue suit, his striped necktie correctly knotted, his straw hat a clean yellow, his shoulders padded exactly as the fashion called for, swaying easily with the rocking of the coach, so remote the soot and smoke apparently did not dare come near him, all as if this were an excursion to a pleasant Sunday outing, as if there were no such thing as heat, or cinders, or an aching heart, or thirst and hunger.

Oh yes, I know what's in your mind, Mr. Dunbar. You're thinking of my oh so confident words when you let me out the door at the McCraes: "I'm only sorry I won't have the chance to prove how wrong you are about Tony." And you're thinking, "Well, one would hardly say she *looks* very happy." The way you're so studiously avoiding so much as a glance at me now—it's your way of saying it makes you uncomfortable to be in the presence of a creature who has let herself sink to such a sorry state, from the place she held when she graced the McCraes' dinner table. And the obvious dislike with which you're regarding my husband—oh yes, it's obvious, though you think you're so subtle—so you think you were right about him, do you?

She looked at Tony herself and grimaced. Besides needing a shave, there was a dent in his dusty derby, his shirt was not clean, his suit was rumpled. Surely Allen Dunbar had noticed also that they had no luggage except her small grip. Would they ever see their trunks again? They were still on the train ahead, the train from which they had been put at Topeka because they had no tickets.

The memory of the humiliating experience made her writhe. Tony's insane confidence that on such a crowded train as that had been the conductor would go by without asking for tickets—that he could outwit the conductor in any event. Well, his confidence had vanished now. Oh, straighten up, you! she wanted to shout at him.

She saw Tony pushing close to Allen Dunbar and saying something in his ear. Dunbar's half-smile, his nod. And the two men began shoving their way to the rear of the coach. What now? she wondered wearily.

She unpinned her hat and put it in her lap. Leaning her head against

the plush, she closed her eyes. She did not want to think about herself . . . not now. But remorselessly the past four months fluttered up like a clutter of photographs.

Her necklace and earrings. Was that where it had begun? Yes, had she only known it—but that incident was far distant now, and slight in comparison with all that came later. This train . . . how unlike their first train journey, from Washington to St. Louis . . . a wedding journey, her first Pullman, Tony the ardent—and at that time still the considerate—lover. It had not been difficult to forgive him for pawning the jewels. Being with him had been all that mattered: she had still thought then that he was sublimely wonderful.

Through the memory of agonies she had since undergone, it was still possible to recall the happiness of their first few weeks. There had been the cities, new and great and strange to her. St. Louis, Kansas City, Chicago. Walking along the shore of Lake Michigan, hand in hand with Tony, the spring breeze coming off the blue water. Tossing peanuts to the comical bears at the St. Louis Zoo. Going to the major league ball games. Even getting Tony to a performance of *Rigoletto*—her first opera.

It was at that opera, she remembered, that they began playing the game which she had named their Someday game. They had been sitting in their gallery seats, Sawyer's eyes roving the elegance of the gilded auditorium, when she said, "Someday, Tony, when we've become very wealthy we'll sit in one of those boxes down there—"

"Aren't these seats I got good enough?" asked Tony anxiously. "I didn't know you wanted to sit in a box or I'd have got them."

"That's not it, dear," she laughed. "These are just the right seats for us now, while we're young. I'm talking about *someday*, when you've had time to rise and be oh, so successful. I'll be wearing a diamond tiara like that old lady down there—see, Tony, that one in the left box—which you will have given me on our wedding anniversary. And we will be at the opera in our box that night because you have just—well, let's see, what will you have just done, sweet?"

Tony looked at her with amusement. "What is this? Are you being a kid?" She blushed; he patted her hand. "Okay, simpleton, I'll play it with you. Why, I will have just landed a big contract to dig a canal from Chicago to New Orleans, putting the Mississippi out of business. So we come here to celebrate—Jesus, what a place to celebrate!"

"You're going to learn to like opera, Tony—someday—I'll bet you will."

"Lot of wops selling fish." He saw her glance uneasily at the people nearby to see if they overheard his remark. He frowned. "All right, look—we come to the opera—and then we go to the Palmer House. And when we come in the orchestra will play *Lilacs in Her Hair*. That'll be

for you." He glanced at her, her eyes were dreamy. "No matter where we go, the orchestra will play that, and everybody will know you're entering, and some of them will even stand up to see better. You'll stick your nose in the air, see, and just glide right by 'em to our table, where I'll toss down a few diamonds for you just to play with till the champagne comes. You like that, don't you? You've got a beautiful smile, baby, when you turn it on."

"You've got such a nice imagination, Tony."

"That's the easiest handful of diamonds I ever bought in my life. How about a couple of bushels of 'em, madam?"

Though Tony amused her with his Someday notions, Sawyer wasn't quite satisfied with the way he played it. He didn't quite get into it the yearning, the sort of aching for a life that was grand and happy and without harshness, that made it such a delight for her. But his ideas were fun, anyway. Anything with Tony was fun for those first weeks.

It seemed incredible now that she could have been so stupid, but at the time she had accepted as part of the adventure their living in an ornate hotel suite one week, breakfast served to them in bed, and the next week living in a rooming house, Tony counting his change as they ordered coffee and doughnuts in a café. Only gradually, as some reason came back to her, had she given thought to the abrupt ups-and-downs of their financial status.

One day she asked him, "Tony, what is it we're doing?"

"What do you mean, what are we doing?"

"Well, it's all very exciting, travelling around the way we do, and I know you're out working hard all day, and I've tried to imagine—I've imagined you doing so many different wonderful things—but what is your work?"

"Look, sweet," said Tony, "I'm just getting things set to give you everything your little heart desires. All you have to do is put up with me for just a little while longer."

She knew he was being evasive, but she laughed, "I could put up with you for ever."

Still, she couldn't help wondering. One curious thing: they would be walking along a street and he would see a man selling an article of some kind from a folding stand; Tony would wait until the crowd had dispersed, then take the man aside and talk with him, finally writing something on a slip of paper for him. When, as they walked on, Sawyer looked at him questioningly, Tony would only say, "One more in the bag, honey."

Finally, she asked, "Tony, what do you talk to those men about?"

"I'm getting their views on the little brown brother."

"Please, Tony," she smiled, "I'm dying of curiosity. Tell me!"

He answered irritably. "You're doing all right, aren't you? Mind your own business."

They continued home in silence, Tony glum, Sawyer sickened by his first harsh word. They walked up to their pleasant three-room flat, and she slowly took off her hat and went out to the kitchen to fix supper. In a few minutes she heard the door slam. She went into the front room. He had left. She sat down and cried.

He returned about ten o'clock. He put his derby on the tabouret by the door, and, his back to her, he said sulkily, "I figured you didn't want to eat supper with anybody like me."

She ran to him. "Oh, Tony! I hurt your feelings, didn't I? Please." She turned him round to her; he kept his eyes on the floor. "I apologise, darling," she said. "I shouldn't be so inquisitive." She stood close to him and touched his cheek and neck with her fingertips; she slid a hand under his coat and caressed his side with her palm, as he had taught her to do.

Such a slight quarrel couldn't survive between husband and wife lying side by side, she was sure, and when at last, as they lay in bed, he put an arm around her and drew her close, she knew the misunderstanding had gone and her heart was happy.

To be in his arms was the best of life: she had thought their wedding night the ultimate in bliss, but she had discovered that their first night had been only a promise of the rapture they could have together. Under his tutelage, Sawyer had learned to love without restraint. For a while, she sometimes reproached herself for becoming wanton, but the passion which Tony aroused in her swept away all qualms and she loved him shamelessly. She loved it most when he was mischievous; then, he called her naughty names and whispered in her ear words that she knew were wicked. This mischievous whispering, which would have been considered misbehaviour if spoken in the outside world, signified for her the intimacy of their withdrawal, where there were special rules, where she no longer had to be a refined and proper girl, but was an awakened woman shut away with her lover . . .

Sawyer stretched the back of her aching neck against the plush seat. How long was it since it had been like that with them? . . .

"You cheap tinhorn!" The horrible moment when the detective had said that, confronting them as they came down the stairs of the mean little hotel they were living in one week.

Tony taking her arm and pressing it hard—a signal, she realised, to be silent. "You've made some mistake, officer," he said easily. "I'm Anthony H. Tyndall, wagon grease dealer, and this is my wife."

"You've done all the greasing you're going to do in this town," said the detective. "You're leaving by the next train and I'm taking you to it."

"Are you sure this isn't a case of mistaken identification?" asked Tony.

"Do you want me to bust you one?"

Tony's smirk, his little bow, guiding her back up the stairs, where he began packing as the detective waited at the open door.

"Tony!" she whispered. "What in heaven's name is this?"

"Shut up and pack," he said. "I'll tell you later."

Tony laughing with gay unconvincingness as they boarded the train, standing in the vestibule as the train pulled out and thumbing his nose at the detective who stood on the platform contemptuously watching them go.

Every click of the rails punctuating a terrifying question in her heart. Why, she kept asking herself, doesn't he explain? Why? He sat beside her with arms folded, lips compressed, staring straight ahead. At last, she ventured: "Tony——" He mumbled something about wanting a smoke and abruptly got up and went to the smoker. The train had gone a hundred miles and was entering a city before he returned and said, "Come on. We're getting off here."

They were in a hotel room, the shabbiest one yet, and he was putting his shirt in a drawer, she standing at a dirty window looking out at a brick wall. She could bear his stubborn silence no longer. Something dreadful was threatening their happiness. Something had to be done about it. She turned around.

"I think I'm entitled to know, Tony."

He looked up from the bureau drawer. "Know what?"

"The truth. Why that detective ordered you—us—to leave town."

"Look, he just made a mistake, that's all. But it would have been useless to argue with him. You can't argue with a cop. I was about through with that town, anyway. Nobody got hurt, did they? He just thought I was somebody else."

"Tony," said Sawyer hesitantly, "you're not telling the truth."

"You think I'm a liar?" he said hotly.

She closed her eyes for a moment. "Let's not use words like that."

"Well, then, stop calling me 'a liar.'"

"Listen, dear," said Sawyer. "If it's something you think I won't understand about, I'll understand. I know you haven't done anything really wrong. You couldn't. But—you don't want me to be unhappy, do you? This isn't very pleasant for me, Tony, being kept in the dark. I'm your wife. I'm supposed to share everything that happens—the bad as well as the good. But how can I, if I don't know?"

"Very pretty," said Tony. "All right, sit down." She sat in a straight chair and he drew a rocker opposite her and leaned forward. "Now, look, sweet—what I'm doing is just temporary. The only reason I'm

doing it is so you can eat and have a place to sleep and something to wear until we get where we're finally going."

To show her gratefulness, she reached for his hand. He let her squeeze, then withdrew it and took out a pack of Turkish Trophies.

"The reason we're running around the country so much—I know it's hard on you and I'll be glad when it's over——"

"I've loved every minute of it, Tony."

"All right. What I'm about to tell you I'm not supposed to. But as you say, you're my wife. You remember Barney Foster?"

"Yes, of course."

"Of course. You wouldn't be likely to forget him. Not after the way he looked at you at the Ball—and the way you kissed each other in the hall that morning."

"I didn't kiss him, my lover—he kissed me. I was a defenceless bride." She laughed. "I knew then you didn't like it."

"But you did, didn't you?"

Her smile faded. "Tony," she said reprovingly.

"All right, forget it." He lit a cigarette and blew out the match. "Now—Foster is a friend of mine. He's a big man. He's going places. And he's taking me along with him. It's my big chance. And it won't be more than a couple of months now till it starts coming off. When it does, all this is just going to be a memory. I'm going to get for you everything a woman wants—everything a beautiful woman who is used to fine things is entitled to."

"But doing what, Tony?"

"Well, it's politics. I'm going to be in politics. Not crooked politics. Foster isn't that kind of a person and I wouldn't have anything to do with it if it was crooked. It's going to be clean, honest politics and I'm going up in the world. You watch and see. I'm going to be a man a woman like you can be proud of."

"I'm proud of you now, Tony," said Sawyer. "Every time I look at you I feel so proud I can't stand it."

"No," he said, "there's no reason to be yet. But there will be. Ah, sweetheart," he said, and he took both her hands and held them in his, the cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth, "I can just see you. You're not going to wear anything but silk, see, the finest imported silk. And you're going to have a carriage with big silver lamps and pulled by two black horses—a high-stepping matched pair. Someday—before very long—we're going to have the biggest people in town in to parties and, honey, when you come down the stairs and all the people take deep breaths because you're so beautiful, I'm going to be saying to myself, 'Look what I've got.' I'm going to say to my-

self, 'You're the luckiest guy in the world to have a wife like that.' Can't you just see it?"

"Yes!" said Sawyer breathlessly. "Yes, I can see it. Oh, darling, and when I see you standing there——"

Tony reached for his derby and got up, saying, "I'll be over by the big fireplace showing 'em the big moose head I shot——"

"That's right. And I'll come up and put my hand on your arm, and everybody will say to one another, 'What a handsome couple.' Won't they?"

"Sure," said Tony, at the door. "Someday before long."

"The cleverest and most charming couple in our city." She hesitated. "What city will it be, Tony?"

"Well," he said, putting on his derby at an angle, "it won't be a city—not at first. There won't be anything there at first."

"What?"

"It's a new country that's being opened—out in the Southwest."

"Oh."

"You sound disappointed."

"Oh—no. It's just that—well, I was sort of picturing it—and I was seeing a big city—you know, a kind of mansion we lived in, I guess, and——" She laughed. "I can be so silly! Why, I think that will be wonderful, Tony! Oh—is that the country that's going to be opened by the lottery?"

"Yep—that's where we're heading, to be big people someday. It's a special kind of place, see? It's not for people who are doing all right where they are. It's for people who want a fresh start—that's the only kind that'll be there. I'll be back."

"All right." He had opened the door when she said suddenly, "But you haven't told me. About that detective—why he ordered us to leave?"

"For Christ's sake," Tony exploded. "Is that all you can think of?"

He banged the door behind him. Sawyer stared after him, shocked.

By the time he returned, two hours later, Sawyer's speculations had become so fantastic that she was in a mood of despair. She kept hearing the detective's "You cheap tinhorn." She thought she knew the meaning of the word: a shoddy gambler, and likely not an honest one. She couldn't accept that role for Tony—yet, why wouldn't he explain? What was he keeping back? Every picture she conjured of him committing a wrong, she rejected; he didn't fit it. He would simply have to tell her the truth himself.

When he came in, she was seated by a table reading a magazine which a previous occupant of the room had left behind. He pulled a wad of bills out of his pocket and tossed it on the table. "See?" he

said cheerfully. "I'll take care of you. Why don't you go out and buy yourself some new duds? You need 'em."

She decided it would be best to come straight to the point.

"Where did you get this money, Tony?" she asked firmly.

"What does that matter?"

"It matters a good deal. Did you get it by gambling?"

"Gambling? No. Now listen——"

"No, you listen."

"You don't think much of me, do you? You don't trust me." He scowled. "You think I'm a crook."

She got to her feet. "You're not. I love you too much to believe you could be anything but honest. But if, temporarily, you've been driven to something you're not proud of even yourself, then I think we should both know about it."

"Why don't you shut up?" he shouted at her. "Why do you think you have to know so much? Do you want to ruin everything?" She waited for his flare-up to subside: he had been drinking. "All right, all right," he said sullenly. "I was a damn fool to think I could put it over, anyway. Sit down. You want it, you're going to get it."

As she sat in the straight chair, Sawyer began to wish she hadn't insisted; trembling, she sensed that from this moment their marriage might start on a new and disastrous course. Tony started to sit down, also, but instead he began pacing the floor.

"If you'd just given me two months more, all this would have been in the past and you wouldn't even be interested in it. But you can't wait. And the first thing you're going to say is I tricked you, that if I had just told you before I married you, you wouldn't have married me."

"I would have married you, Tony, regardless of anything."

"Oh yes?" he said "I don't believe ladies of your position usually marry con men, do they?"

"What's a con man?"

"Oh, my God." He threw up his hands. "Look." He reached into his pocket and took out the padlock. "See this? You've seen it before."

"I know you always carry it. You showed it to me in the restaurant, our first day."

"Maybe even then I had an impulse to tell you the truth. I don't know. Anyway, I couldn't. You would have run."

"You said it was just a parlour trick."

"Well, it's not. The idea is a guy finds it and can't open it and I come along and finally bet him I can, and when I do, I walk off with his dough. I drop it where he'll find it in the first place, see?" He stood tense, clenching the padlock, and waited for her reaction to his disclosure.

"And then what?" she asked.

"That's all."

"You mean that's all you do?"

"Yes, now you know."

She laughed.

"What's funny?"

"Oh Tony," she said and could say no more for a moment through her uncontrollable laughter. "Is that really all there is?"

"Isn't that enough? Stop laughing like that. It don't sound like you're tickled."

"I'm sorry—I can't stop laughing. Why—I'm so relieved, that's all! Oh, I was having such terrible thoughts about—I was half-frightened to death. And now—it's nothing but making a bet with some stupid person about opening a padlock. It seems so—childish!"

"You think so?" said Tony pugnaciously; then, he forced a laugh himself. "I guess that's what it is. It's not really anything bad."

"But the detective——" She frowned.

"Cops don't think much of it."

"But—Tony, while I've been trying to think back to find something that would tell me what you were doing, I remembered that when you slipped beside me at the Inauguration—were the policeman and that man chasing you?"

"Well——"

"They were, weren't they?"

"All right. But like you say, it's just a case of somebody being stupid enough to make a bet on a little thing."

She shook her head. "But if the police—It must be considered wrong—and besides, it's a such a childish way of making a living. You're a grown man, darling, and a very, very brilliant and intelligent man. You're too capable to be playing with a thing like that. Why, as fine a man as you are, you should be *working* at something—well, the way other men do."

"With six grades of school? You didn't know that, did you? You're a well-educated woman—you didn't know your husband was so ignorant, did you?"

"You're not! You have a natural intelligence, and a charm! Why I can just see you! Succeeding wonderfully at anything you turned your hand to. Why, Tony, you'd have just one promotion after another—you're so clever and——"

"Look," said Tony, "just shut up a minute. You're talking so fast you're running away with yourself. Don't you think I can tell what you're really thinking inside? You're scared and you're all turned upside down because you know what kind of a husband you've hooked

to. Just shut up a minute. It shows all over you. Your lips are white as a sheet. And now the first thing you can think of is to try to pull it out of the fire by trying to reform me."

"Reform you? You don't need reforming. You're perfect just as you are. All I want you to do is to get a job you yourself will be proud of."

"Driving a beer wagon? Sweeping out?"

"I don't care what kind of job it is. It wouldn't be for long. We'll be out to our new country before long, won't we? Where you'll begin doing your *real* work. I don't care whether it pays very little. Don't worry about me. I'll live on *anything*—it won't matter, just so I'm with you."

"You're trying to reform me," he insisted belligerently. "You've found out that I'm a whole lot less a person than I kidded you into thinking I was, and now you're trying to pull me up to your level. Just listen, will you? I know what a high-class dame—lady—you are. I know exactly the kind you are. I dreamed about you for years before I ever met you. I didn't think I'd ever have a woman like you—you were the kind I saw getting out of carriages in front of fine restaurants, or coming out of theatres with fancy dudes—too high up there for any guy like me to do more than look at. When I met you and saw maybe I could get you if I played it right I nearly keeled over. I said then I was going to do everything I knew how to make you proud of me. But you've just about killed hell out of everything. I never would let anybody look down on me and I'm not going to start now. I got kicked around in my family, I got kicked around when I was a kid in school, and I never was called anything but an alley rat until I was big enough to whip anybody that said it—or most everybody. You've got a look in your eye right now that says you think I'm an alley rat and you're working your pretty little head off trying to figure out a way to clean me up so I'll be fit for you!"

"Tony, you're out of your mind!"

"No, baby, I'm smart. I've had to be. Will you let me go on being a con man, using this padlock to buy coffee and cakes, and still think I'm okay?"

"I think there can be more to you than somebody the police are always after—that's all."

"That's right. You want to reform me. Well, let me tell you something. They tried to reform me at reform school and I didn't like it." He shouted: "You wanted to know everything, didn't you? Just had to! And now you know I've been in reform school. You see what's happened? A lovely flower of Southern aristocracy has got herself married to an ex-convict! How do you like that? You don't have to say. You can't! It's in your face, though! You've just seen a ghost."

Later, she knew that if only she had said something—anything—immediately, all might have been different. But the suddenness with which he delivered his bare statement of “ex-convict” did leave her speechless for a fatal ten seconds. By then, it was too late. Even as she opened her mouth to speak, he had turned to the door.

“Tony,” she whispered, “where are you going?”

“If it’s any of your goddam business, Madame Magnolia, I’m going to get drunk.” And, in the next instant, he was gone, and she was facing a closed door.

From that day Tony, continually irritable, dropped every courtesy and endearing tenderness. He boasted of his misdeeds as a boy in the streets of Newark, he bragged of how he duped innocent people of their money, all the while talking argot out of the corner of his mouth. Sawyer knew it was possible for a person to turn dissimilar facets of his personality to the fore—she herself instinctively sought to be whatever kind of person a given situation demanded—but Tony had become so completely the opposite of himself, as she had first known and loved him, that she wildly wondered if he were not a substitute, a double, for the real Tony. More frightening than his conduct was the pleasure he seemed to get from assaulting her dignity with it. Whenever she failed to keep even the shadow of distaste from her expression in the presence of an especially repulsive vulgarity, she saw his eyes flicker and his lips smirk.

Why? she kept asking herself. Why is he trying to destroy me, our love, our lives together? Surely, she told herself, this is only a phase; he temporarily thinks it was a mistake to get married; he feels trapped—I must let him see he can have all the freedom he wants. I couldn’t have been so wrong about him. Over and over these and like statements repeated themselves in her mind, and always most emphatic was the warning: if you should lose him, you’re alone, with nowhere to go and no one to turn to.

He had not approached her as a lover for more than two weeks when, one night, Sawyer conceived the idea that if they could only return to the happiness they had enjoyed in physical love, it might prove to be the beginning of a rapprochement. With careful wiles, she sought to arouse his desire for her, and was exultant when she won him—for a moment she was. The minutes after that were horror. The words which he began to growl in her ear were not mischievous teasing spoken in endearment—they were the same words, but they were made gross and obscene by the undisguised viciousness with which he uttered them; they were aimed directly, it seemed to her, at shrivelling her soul. Angrily, he demanded that she repeat the words to him, and when she shook her head, he hurt her and cursed her with a fury

that ascended with the violence of his rutting. Then, and in like times that followed, she was a spiritless and insensible lump from which he took a solitary satisfaction.

One night he did not come home at all to the bedroom-and-kitchen in which they were living, on a back street in a rundown part of some midwestern city or other—she had given up trying to remember the names of cities and towns. He came in about noon next day. Without apology, he changed his shirt, had a badly-needed shave, and started out again. At the door he turned with a half-smile: “Oh, too bad I couldn’t get home to fix you up last night, I—” with a cute expression “—met somebody.”

Three minutes later he came back in.

She had a feeling he had been standing outside the door. She still sat by the window, staring out at the city. He came to the centre of the room, derby pushed back, hands on hips. She looked up at him calmly. He regarded her with incredulity.

“Tell me something,” he said, “are you a woman or a mouse?”

“What?”

“Just what in the name of good holy Christ does it take? Haven’t you got an iota of self-respect? How much can you Southern aristocrats swallow anyhow?”

She continued to look at him without a change of expression, but the knuckles of her hands clasped in her lap whitened.

He threw up his arms wildly. “You’re enough to drive a man batty,” he shouted. “I’ve done everything I can think of and still you won’t say it.”

“What do you want me to say?”

“You know what.”

“I’ve no idea.”

“Just one goddam thing. I want you to admit you think you’re better than I am.”

“Oh Tony.”

“Don’t ‘Oh Tony’ me. Just admit it.”

“But Tony, I don’t think so. I’ve never wanted to think so. I just wanted us to be happy and love each other.”

“And float around in clouds and make out you’re living in a fairy castle. But the first time the least little thing turns out to be not Sunday School perfect, you dry up. Don’t you think I know what you’ve been thinking?”

“I—haven’t thought anything.”

“You’re a liar. You’re as clear as glass. You’ve been thinking how did the flower of a fine old aristocratic family ever get tied up with a skunk.”

Sawyer got to her feet. “Tony,” she said, “I think that right there

lies the error that has caused so much unhappiness between us."

"Ah ha!" said Tony. "And what is this great error?"

"It's your misconception of me. Isn't it? From the very first day you have had me on a pedestal. You've talked of how perfect you think I am, of how I belong to a class you had always considered above you. And because it made me happy to have you elevate me, I didn't tell you how wrong you were. I *wanted* to be thought of that way, because nobody else ever had. But I was wrong to do it, wasn't I? Because when I found out certain things about you—things that didn't make the slightest difference to me, compared to all else we had—if you'd only believe that!—why, you were so hurt that ever since you've been trying to hurt yourself even more by pretending to be so much worse than you could possibly be. Oh, I'm not any good at figuring these things out—but isn't that it, Tony, isn't it? Isn't that why you've been behaving as you have?"

He smirked malevolently. "You're doing the talking."

"All right. You said you tricked me into marriage by not telling the truth about yourself. I deceived you just as much—and whether unwittingly or purposely I couldn't tell you now."

"Now just how did you, my sweet?"

"Well, at the Ball, for example, you thought I belonged there as a member of—the upper crust, you called it. Tony, you had every bit as much right there as I did."

"Kiddo, I had a phony invitation and a rented dress suit."

"I was in a borrowed dress. That's what I mean. We were two of a kind."

"Don't give me that crap!" he said angrily.

"I'm determined, Tony, that you shall know what the truth is—that you're the one who is a better person than I am. I'm going to tell you some things I didn't ever expect to tell anyone—things I've lived in dread of people finding out."

"You'd eat dirt, wouldn't you?" he said.

"Yes, if it would take us back to where we were six weeks ago. We've got to get back! Tony, I'm not a member of an aristocratic family—I don't know what an aristocrat is—I know I'm not one. My father—you saw him yourself—he was regarded as a traitor in his own town because he made money at the expense of his own people, after the War. We weren't even socially acceptable. My father was looked on as queer, and I'm sure I was too. I didn't have any friends. My brother got into trouble and ran away and died in a foreign land. My mother—" Sawyer hesitated, shook off her reluctance, and plunged ahead. "My mother ran off with another man, Tony—do you know, what that made her? My father called her an adulteress."

"Oh, shut up!" said Tony angrily. "What the hell are you giving me?"

"It's the truth, Tony. And there are lots of other things about me and my family. And this will really let you know the truth, Tony." There were tears in her eyes, and she felt she had become incoherent, but she rushed blindly on. "There is a word you use to express what you think of certain people sometimes and it makes me sick every time I hear it. Because I know I probably am really that kind of person. I—don't even know who my father was." She said with a rush: "It could have been either of two men, and I don't know—nobody who is alive now knows. Do you know what that makes me? Is there anything about you that could make you lower than a——"

There was a roaring in her head and a blackness breaking into rifts, and she found herself struggling up from her knees and he was shouting: "Shut up! Shut up or I'll kill you!"

She reached her feet. "Don't hit me," she said. The terrible sting again—the flashing blindness. She pushed herself away from the wall. "Don't, Tony."

"Don't? I'll kill you! What are you trying to do to me? Are you trying to ruin everything? Haven't you already ruined enough? God damn you, I'll——"

"Go away from me, Tony. Go away." She made her way to a chair and sat on it and rested her aching head in her hands.

He stood over her. "I'm not going to let you get away with that," he said. "You are not going to lie to me and try to make out you're all that when I know what you are. Get up. Get up, I said." He shook her shoulder roughly and pulled her to her feet. "I want you to slap me," he said. "Slap me and tell me you think you're better than I am. Tell me you're a lady and you think I'm a skunk. Go on, do you hear me?"

She closed her eyes.

"Open 'em. Open them, I said!"

She saw he was slipping the belt out of his pants. He doubled it. She stood erect and waited . . .

"Take the belt," he said. He forced it into her hand. "I'm going to start calling you names. When you've had enough, start hitting me. Hit me and tell me you think you're better than I am."

Looking narrowly into her eyes, he began to utter a string of obscene epithets.

The belt dropped from her fingers. She walked in a daze to the dresser.

"Hopeless," said Tony. He stooped and picked up his belt and put it in the pants loops. "A hopeless jellyfish."

She felt an anger rising in her, cold, deliberate, and sickening anger.

When she faced him, the hatred in her mind affected her eyes, so that she saw him standing in a haze of red. "It's in my heart," said Sawyer. "I think you're a beast—a vile, utterly rotten beast. I can't understand you. I—don't know what you are."

He flashed a broad smile and his brown eyes danced with delight. "Now you're talking!" he cried. "I knew it was in you. A lady would *have* to think I was that, wouldn't she? Tell me more. Call me some more."

"You're a vile beast," she repeated.

"Oh good, good! Vile, you said. Utterly rotten. You make me *want* you, do you know it?"

Swiftly he came to her, and embraced her. "You darling!" he said. As suddenly, he drew away from her and laughed. "Let's have some dinner! No, don't you lift a hand. You've earned a good meal, my lady, and I'm the boy who can fix it."

He went out to the kitchen with a light step.

She stared after him blankly for a moment, but then the hatred returned to her eyes, and her lip twitched with contempt.

After that, Sawyer made no further attempt to redeem their marriage. The love she had felt for him had vanished—had so completely disappeared that she could not even recall why she had thought she loved him in the first place. Her heart was as vacant as an abandoned house. She only wanted to have as little contact with him as possible.

She was not moved when he came home one day with the announcement that he had got a job. "Just like you wanted," he said. "You've got your heart's desire now—a husband just like other women's. Christ, what a thing to want." When she made no comment, he scowled. "But don't think I've 'reformed,' as you call it. I just haven't been able to pick up any other coin here and we need train fare to Indianapolis. It'll just be for a week."

For three days then, Tony did leave every morning at seven and return home at six in the evening. He seemed cheerful about it. She told herself not to let herself be tricked into believing that his taking a job was indicative of a change in their lives. But, as she listlessly tidied their rooms and prepared supper, the habit of dreaming of better things set her imagination involuntarily into motion. Hardly before she knew it, she was seeing him rising to the head of the shipping department where he was working, and eventually being promoted to manager. She tried to shake it off, but despite her denial, her mind suddenly flashed a picture of Tony and herself invited to the house of the firm's president for dinner.

Then, on the fourth evening, when he did not come home; and late that night, the knock at the door. The policeman standing there—

"Are you Mrs. Tyndall?"

"What's happened to him?"

"He's in jail for assaulting a man. His foreman."

Tony standing behind the screened bars, dishevelled, his face contorted with rage, ordering her to leave, cursing, demanding to know why she had come to see him in jail—so she could get even with him by making fun of him? Telling her to get out, to stay in their rooms, to wait there, or go to hell, but to get out, get out!

Then, sitting every day on the bench on the city hall lawn, the oak leaves unfolding a little more each day, her eyes rarely leaving the squat red-brick jail . . . not knowing why she was waiting, except that she must sit, until he came out, for there was nowhere else to go . . .

Until on the tenth day he sauntered down the worn stone steps, pulling on his coat. Going to him then, repulsed by the fury in his eyes, she taking long steps, sometimes quick little running steps, while he strode fast as if hoping to leave her behind. He going directly into their walk-up rooms, jerking out the bureau drawer, tilting up the half-full quart of whisky he had left there, gulping, gulping, until his throat would stand it no longer.

"Didn't I tell you to keep away from that jail?" he shouted. "You wanted to see me there. Yes, God damn you, you wanted me to get a job, didn't you? Be a goddam shipping clerk, ordered around by a son-of-a-bitch who thought I was dirt under him. I showed the bastard, the big bastard!"

"Tony," she pleaded, coming to him.

She saw his arm lift, and she did not have time to move. She lay in the corner, her jaw numb, and he came to her there and kicked her in the stomach, in the side, in the back as she struggled across the floor from him.

"Damn you, damn you!" shouting with each kick. "Get your dirty tail out of here and stay out. I don't want to ever see your calamity-yapping butt again. You've been nothing but a rosy pain in the neck to me. Get out, you blubber-headed buttinski, get out!"

And crawling, staggering, she reached the door, and ran out and down the stairs, hatless, coatless, and it was dusk by then, and she ran until she could no longer run, then she walked until she could run again, going she had no idea where, past the windows of the pawnshops, the secondhand clothing stores, the hole-in-the-wall jewelry and barber shops. It became dark, and there were shadows of men moving about her, whistling, whispering, "Hello, sweetheart," "Oh you chicken, how about a little fun?" Running again, the shadows laughing and jibing as she sped past them. The blue uniform, the helmet under the arclight, the hoarse, "Wait a minute there, sister!" Running madly

then, the vinegary smell of a pickle works cutting her lungs, down an alley behind it, knocking over garbage cans, reeling, falling amid empty boxes, lying motionless, a little silence, then the heavy footsteps approaching, going past, fading . . .

After a while, her breathing normal, but cold striking her, she turned on her side and drew up her knees. Aware of her heart beating, she willed it to stop, but it pumped on relentlessly. If only I lie here long enough, I will die, and that is all I want now. A sprinkle of rain, then a steady drizzle. Becoming wet and colder still, a will to live feebly reviving, her stricken mind demanding that she take her body somewhere for warmth.

Getting to her feet at last, pushing back the wet strings of hair from her eyes, feeling her way out of the alley, feet sloshing through the puddles. The shuttered shops, the streets deserted in the rain—was there nowhere in the city a door that would open to her knock? To-morrow, a job might be found. What kind of job? What do you know? Apply for a job—looking like this? And when is to-morrow? What of to-night? Every corner she came to, peering down the side streets, every street darker and more terrifying than the last.

"Gotcha!" The figure jumping from the doorway. "Cut out the belling, sister."

The jail, light and warm—she had been here before, as had Tony. The ruddy man behind the desk, writing indifferently in a big book.

"What're you puttin' against this drowned kitten, Stan?"

"Disorderly conduct, an' drunk in a public place, an' soliciting, an'——"

"Whoa! That's enough."

"No, no—please listen! My husband——".

The sergeant looking up. "You married?"

"Yes, he——"

"Say, ain't you the dame who's been parkin' on the bench outside waitin' for her hubby to do his time?"

"He's at home now. We——"

"Had a fight?"

"Well——"

"A man'd hit a woman on the jaw like that bruise you got there ain't fit to live." He shrugged. "What'd you do to deserve it?"

"Please, I haven't been drinking—don't put me in jail."

He sighed and put down his pencil. "Go on home."

"But—I can't. He—told me not to. I——"

"Listen, sister——" the policeman said. "Cut out the argument. It's either you get off the streets or it's the lockup."

"He'll——"

The sergeant: "Take 'er home, Stan. And if he opens his trap, bust him one for me."

The policeman, disgruntled: "I ain't goin' to have goin's-on like this on my beat. Coupla tramps."

"You've got ten times worse on your beat. What's a family fight? We'd have the place overflowing."

. . . The bedroom lamplighted, Tony in his clothes snoring on the bed. Water dripping from her skirts to the carpet.

"Pretty specimen, ain't he?" said the policeman. "Now look, I don't want no more trouble from you two. And it might be a good idea if you got out of this neighbourhood to-morrow. I don't want the likes of you underfoot." The door slamming, but Tony not waking.

Extinguishing the lamp, fumbling off her wet clothes, slipping into a dry nightgown, falling exhausted on the bed beside him. Cold, her teeth chattering, her body shaking. She would die of pneumonia—that would be her release. As her mother had died. Like mother, like daughter. Staring at the unseen ceiling, praying, but the image not appearing. Her mother's spirit could never have put her here; the spirit could not exist. Who guides the spinning twig on the mindless tide? This is abject surrender, but I don't care, not at all. Do with me what you will . . . only keep me dry and warm and feed me . . . Once in the night Tony throwing an arm across her and muttering, "Louise," then rolling back . . . The blackness fading and flushing to daylight; and when Tony awoke, smacking a bad taste, he turned his head toward her. She waited, wondering if he would say, "Forgive me." Slight surprise in his dull eyes, he only said, "Couldn't stay away, hunh?" He got up, muttering, "I need a drink," and, sleepily rubbing his bristled cheek, he went out.

Sawyer lay silent and kept her mind empty of thought or emotion. When he returned, an hour later, he felt better—even cheerful. He had brought her a fried egg sandwich in a paper bag and a container of coffee. She sat up in bed to eat, while he went down the hall to shave. The hot coffee revived her thinking processes. She brought to the front of her consciousness an idea that had feebly nagged her, almost without her being aware of it, ever since she had discovered that she no longer loved her husband. Tony himself had said little recently of the new and better life that awaited them at the end of their journeying. He seemed to have lost a good deal of his enthusiasm for it. But Sawyer had kept a memory of remarks of his such as, "It's a place for people who need a new start in life—they're all that'll be there." "It's a place where anybody can land on Easy Street." "Everything that's been bungled in the past will be forgotten." And what had Allen Dunbar reported his father as saying? "A town where everybody has

to look forward—because there's no past to look back on." It seemed a slight promise, at first—vague and of little substance—but it was the only ray of hope in an existence that had become worse than drab. There weren't more than a few weeks to be endured before they would go there. If she could just hang on that long, why, who could tell what change might be brought about? Not with Tony. She would stay with him only until they reached this strange new place. Somehow, she felt increasingly confident, there would be a way where she could work out a life for herself that wouldn't be craven and miserable. If she could only hold on—letting the days pass, one by one, until she could reach there.

"Your ticket, lady?"

Sawyer's eyes flew open. The conductor, his walrus moustache ferocious, stood over her, puncher in right hand, left hand extended demanding. A burly brakeman at his side. Frantically, she looked around.

Tony held out a bill. A twenty-dollar bill.

"Here you are, conductor. Two tickets—for my wife and me."

Behind Tony stood Allen Dunbar, who was intently regarding the swaying nickel lamp overhead. As the conductor punched the tickets and counted out the change, Tony looked down at Sawyer with a sly wink; he nodded backward ever so slightly, indicating Allen Dunbar, the curl of his lips virtually saying, "There's always a sucker."

She looked down, blindly studying her straw hat. But she dismissed the sense of shame which surged through her. After all, wasn't it better for Tony to borrow the money than for them to be put off a train again, this time in the sight of Allen Dunbar himself? The important thing was to get there. She pushed back her hair and sat up in defiance. Challengingly, she shot Allen Dunbar a cold glance. He was not looking her way . . .

Later, she began passing the time by speculating on the man Overton Dunbar, sitting across from her but next to the window, riding backwards. Basing her fancy on Allen Dunbar's recital of his father's ambition the night at the McCraes, she had visualised him as a tall, spare figure with an intense hawk-like face, the yearning for pioneering running hot in his blood. A frontiersman not in fringed buckskin possibly, but a man who would be at home in such a costume. Instead he turned out to be a rather fleshy man with a paunch. He probably was in his early fifties. The lines in his face were really furrows; his brow was beaded with perspiration; and his nose, far from aquiline, was pugged, and pocked.

Dunbar suddenly switched his gaze from out the window to her.

Pale blue eyes peered at her. Surprised, Sawyer looked away. She sensed it when he was gazing out the window once more. She covertly began studying him again.

Only his mouth and chin, she decided, resembled any feature of his son Allen—the mouth wide and straight and the bold round chin, she suspected, capable of a pugnacious out-thrust.

His hands were broad and thick, with red splotches on their backs. They were clasped loosely in his lap, but the balls of his thumbs rubbed across each other out of time with a nervous movement of his jaws. At first Sawyer thought he was chewing tobacco. Presently, though, he took from his mouth a mangled rubber band, tossed it out the open window, and withdrew another from a vest pocket. Thrusting the new band into his mouth, he resumed the chewing, rapidly at first, then slower and more evenly.

"Welcome to our band of fugitives, young lady," he said without warning, not taking his eyes from the sliding scenery. "We're all fugitives, you know," turning to her; his smile bared square yellow teeth. "Fugitives from sorrow or from persecution. Escaping from the slavery imposed by the Unseen Government that has made it impossible for an American to live in what is now misnamed America."

There was no banter in his tone; he seemed to speak easily and without heat from a sureness that what he said was fact. She responded with an expression of interest.

"They're in pursuit of us, but our train is too fast for them. We're outdistancing them. Oh," he said jovially, "don't think I'm out of my mind. I'm speaking figuratively. But we're all—all of us on this head-long train—we're all escaping from prisons as surely as if bloodhounds and shotguns were on our heels."

He champed the rubber band.

"That's why I like the way you came aboard. You're one of us. Here you are, dirty, torn, wild-eyed. Please," raising a red-splotched hand, "don't be embarrassed. Your appearance is your badge of honour. A man, or a woman, escaping, crawling through swamps, reeds, underbrush, he has no thought of his *clothes*. He's thinking of his *soul*. You scramble through the window. The desperation of hair-breadth escape. Good!"

The blue eyes twinkled, exacting a little smile from her. He nodded approvingly.

"Yes ma'am, I don't know what you're escaping from, you and your husband"—her mind spun briefly: not my husband and I, so far as I'm concerned, just *me*—"but it's worth your life to you, I can tell you that. I know what *I'm* getting away from, and I know what I *want*, and I know as well as I know my own name every man on this train

is escaping from a bondage of *some* kind for a real freedom."

Toward the rear of the coach a dozen voices were raised in a rough approximation of harmony: "I Don't Want to Play in Your Yard."

"Hear that?" said Mr. Dunbar. "Those fellows have been singing like that ever since we left Kansas City. I understand they're factory workers from Chicago who got together to go to the new country. Do you think they'd sing like that going into the galleys of the factory—slaving for Wall Street? No ma'am! That's the voice of their youth come back. They know they've got a chance to be new men. Isn't it wonderful, young lady?"

Sawyer nodded. "Yes!" she said. "Oh yes!"

"The children of Israel escaping Egypt. No more making bricks without straw. To the land of Canaan. No Moses in our midst, not that I've seen, and we wouldn't want one that told us what we *had to do*. That's what I believe in—let everybody do as he gosh darn well pleases! With nobody telling us we have to do this or that every time we turn around. I'm sick of it. The Land of Canaan!" He leaned forward eagerly, slapping his palms between his knees. "Aren't you looking forward to it, young lady?"

She glanced toward Tony; he was not looking at her. "Yes," she said softly.

He chuckled. "Of course a woman couldn't be expected to know the ramifications of the diabolical political and financial octopus that has this country in its clutch. But depend on it: whatever your personal problem may be, you can be sure that at the bottom of it is Wall Street and the Trusts and the Manipulators of Currency. They've got the country we're leaving body and soul."

"Dad," Allen spoke the word firmly. "I expect Tad and George are getting hungry. Suppose we eat a bite."

"I'll say," said Tad.

"Indeed," said George Potter.

Drawn by the first words she had heard him speak, Sawyer turned to Potter, sitting beside her. With his pale lids and long neck, his faint freckles and long nose, he was not impressive. What would Allen's sister, who had married this unimposing specimen, look like, she wondered.

"Are you hungry, George?" asked Mr. Dunbar.

"Indeed, thank you."

Mr. Dunbar, nodding toward George, spoke to Sawyer: "A desperate case, his is, Mrs. Tyndall. Probably one of the most desperate on this train. Would have finished his life as chief clerk of a dry-goods house if we hadn't rescued him to take him with us. George is going to try to win a farm for himself and my daughter Lucy. George wants to farm, don't you?"

George gulped. "Yes sir."

"Dad," repeated Allen. "Shouldn't we eat something now?"

"I suppose. My boy Allen, you know," said Mr. Dunbar to Sawyer, "needs saving more than any of us, but it's hopeless. He knows too much. Why, do you know, he knows more than everybody on this train put together. Yes ma'am. He's well educated, he's well travelled, been to Europe—at my expense, and been to the Orient—at the Sugar Trust's expense." His satirical tone surprised Sawyer. "Oh yes. Been to the Philippines. About three years ago he thought he knew what the Spanish-American war was about. He read some Hearst papers, and 'Free the Cubans from the tyrants of Spain!' he cried, like Sir Galahad himself. Could I tell him the whole thing was a fraud to benefit the Sugar Trust? No ma'am! He had to gallop to the rescue. But he found out. Oh yes, he found out. Free the Cubans? Ha! This boy Allen Dunbar, this son of mine, was sent out to kill simple Filipinos . . ."

From the corners of her eyes Sawyer glimpsed Allen's hand, held at his side, start trembling. Don't, she silently entreated Mr. Dunbar; don't go into that——

". . . Yes ma'am, killing simple Filipinos," repeated Dunbar, "whose only crime was that they were having an exchange of masters, changing Spaniards for the American Sugar Trust. Now that he knows the truth, is Allen fighting the trusts? Oh no. He's decided he likes 'em. He's going on with them. He's going to set up shop in the East and be a corporation lawyer. Greatest mistake in my life, young lady, was in letting his mother persuade me to send this son of mine to Harvard. Worse than wasted my money."

Allen Dunbar's voice was quiet: "Shall I get down the hamper?"

Sawyer glanced up at him. His face was pale. She looked away quickly. She felt sorry for him, but more, she felt embarrassed to have heard what seemed a heartless attack by a father on his son. What, she wondered, lay behind the senior Dunbar's harshness?

"I can reach it." Mr. Dunbar stood up and took down a wicker basket covered with a white cloth and handed it to George Potter.

Allen produced a forced laugh. "You mustn't misunderstand Father's talking about me like that," he said to Sawyer. His colour was returning. "It's his way of joking. You see, Father is a great believer in the freedom of the individual, in theory, but because I don't happen to care for settling in a pioneer town-to-be in the wilds of nowhere, he pretends to be annoyed with me. It's his little joke."

Dunbar waved away George's proffer of the open basket. "Not hungry," he said. "Give mine to Mr. and Mrs. Tyndall." Chin resting on a palm, he stared moodily out the window.

At Potter's courteous insistence, Sawyer removed her gloves and took a sandwich, a hard-boiled egg and a fresh peach. Tony needed no urging. The way he dived into the hamper, outdoing even the greed of the boy Tad, made Sawyer wince. Not until she saw Allen regarding her did she realise that she herself had clutched her ham sandwich with both hands and had stuffed her mouth with two huge bites.

She stopped her jaws abruptly, then, holding the sandwich with dainty indifference, she went on with the leisurely chewing of one who has already dined and has joined in a second repast only out of politeness. O God, she had never been so hungry! Except for a cup of coffee in the Kansas City depot that morning she hadn't eaten since the evening before.

"Won't you have this peach?" she asked, offering it up to Allen. "I don't believe I could eat it."

"Let me peel it for you." He pulled off the skin with a gold penknife linked to his watch-chain, and handed it back.

"Thank you," she said.

She lingered over the fruit, taking ladylike nibbles. She fingered the stone until she was sure Allen was not looking. Then she slipped it in past her lips and laid it on her tongue, which pressed it against her palate and sucked it gently. Surreptitiously, she licked her fingers.

"You've forgotten your egg."

Oh—darn him! She hadn't forgotten it! She put her handkerchief to her mouth and slid the peach stone into it.

"They're good eggs," said Allen. "Mother made up the hamper before we left, guessing there'd be no diner beyond Kansas City."

"Thoughtful of her," said Sawyer. "Your mother and sister—you have just one sister?—I somehow thought they'd be with you."

"Oh no. They'll come later. This initial expedition didn't seem quite the proper journey for ladies."

Her gray eyes narrowed. She could tell he was mentally biting his tongue for having said it like that. Tony was standing a little apart, out of hearing. She decided to smile sweetly. "I agree with you. This is hardly a place for a lady."

"I didn't mean—that is, the uncertainties. They're—— Later, when we know what——"

She ignored him. Untwisting the waxed paper from the peeled egg, she favoured George Potter with a smile and held out the egg for him to sprinkle salt on it. She leaned back and began nibbling with a delicate deliberateness that was exasperating to Tony, who, having polished off two sandwiches, had turned back to the group. He stood gripping a seat back, fascinated by the egg Sawyer held so lightly, his vexed eyes saying, "For God's sake, if you don't want it give it to me!"

Finish it she did, finally—she had had no intention of not finishing it. Tad made his way to and from the cooler bringing water for all in a collapsible cup. Sawyer drank deeply of the coal-tangy ice water. Then, with a sigh, she laid her head back against the seat and closed her eyes once more.

A mood of silence had fallen over the coach, broken only by a subdued and throat-weary singing of "Ta Ra Ra Boom De Ay" by the factory workers at the rear. Overton Dunbar dozed. All around men's eyes had taken on the set, blank look of travellers enduring a hiatus.

The sun sinking, the Kansas fields which had basked in its white light were overlaid with yellow, then with a greenish cast, and at last the purple haze of dusk closed in. The porter made his way down the aisle lighting the lamps. The hot and tired men standing in the aisle began letting themselves down to the floor where one by one they achieved degrees of sleep.

Overton Dunbar had fallen into a slumber, his chin resting on his chest, his jaws still but his thumbs stirring against each other at fitful intervals. Tad slept with his head against his father's shoulder. George Potter's head had fallen back, his mouth hanging agape, so that he looked like a dead man. Allen first flicked a section of the floor with a handkerchief, then sat with his back against a seat arm, and closed his eyes. To the annoyance of those he crowded, Tony stretched out on his side and fell asleep holding his derby clasped to his bosom like a child with its doll. Sawyer turned sideways, her back to Potter's repulsive open mouth, and drew her knees up on the cushion. She knew her neck would be stiff from being bent to one side, but there was no help for it. She fell into a nightmarish sleep.

She and Tony, dancing at the Ball. But the orchestra a chorus of factory workers banging on machines as they sang. Tony's nose tremendous, and he kept rubbing it against her cheek and it got bigger and bigger until he couldn't turn his head without bumping her face. Her mother walked by, dressed in a flowing white robe, and she smiled archly at Tony, and he went to her and she put her arms around him and kissed his nose, and they ran out of the ball-room together, laughing, and left her crying. Dancing with her father, and his weak chin wobbling rapidly, but she couldn't understand what he was saying except that she loved dancing with him. He was so full of glee he jerked her every way, treading on her . . .

Her eyes struggled open. A black man was crawling on hands and knees into the opening between the double seats. Her feet had slipped down and he was forcing his way past them. She almost screamed.

"My brother Fremont," said Allen drowsily, from where he was hunched in the aisle.

"I couldn't stand it up there on the roof any longer," Fremont sobbed. His face was black with soot. "I came down when we stopped just now. I couldn't stand it."

He settled down between the seats. Sawyer saw him furtively eyeing her ankles before his face. She drew her feet up and pulled her skirt down. He curled up beneath her.

The lamps swayed and the car creaked, the wheels thumped over the rail joints and the train went deeper into the night.

The sun was barely up on the other side of the coach. She glanced out the near window. Only a few cultivated fields now, unpainted houses at great intervals, sparse clumps of trees set in the rolling, grassy countryside.

"We're going south," she heard Overton Dunbar saying, and realised that his voice had awakened her. "From the looks of the country, we must be out of Kansas."

"Why, then," said Tad in awe, "we've left the United States!"

"Yes, by thunder!" exclaimed Dunbar. "In a way of speaking, we have!"

CHAPTER NINE

EL RENO ordinarily was a modest territorial town of five thousand population, drowsing in the sun, its unassuming main street the spine for a loose body of residences.

For ten days, however, El Reno had been a madhouse through which had roared a blissfully delirious multitude. Every hour another train dumped a thousand more people into the jam-pack. Ringing the town was a vast encampment of farm conveyances and canvas tents, standing in groves of cookfire smoke rising straight from the prairie into the motionless hot air. On this morning, the last day of registration, sound and motion had risen to a pitch that foretold the nearness of the climax: the lottery drawing itself.

When the train bearing Sawyer stopped at the red-brick depot, the passengers piled out of the coaches and hustled from the roof-tops and almost at once lost the distinction of being new arrivals. They were swallowed by the tumultuous throng inside and outside the station.

Sawyer and Tony and the Dunbars threaded their way through the waiting room to the street door. There they were greeted, not by a committee of welcome, but by a half-paralysed idiot, who leaned against a baggage truck, his withered right arm dangling across his waist, and intoned, "Quarter million people in town." Then, pointing to each person propelled out the doorway, he drooled, "You quarter million nine, you make quarter 'leven, you quarter million three," and leering at Sawyer, "you quarter million fo'teen, sugah-lady."

The figure of a quarter million, as published in the *El Reno Daily*, was not far off for the total of persons who had been drawn out of the nation to this focal point during the ten-day period, although there had not been that number in the town at any one time. A great many farmers who had come during the first days had registered and made their way back to the places they hoped to quit, there to await a notification whether theirs had been among the winning first thirteen thousand numbers drawn. A majority of the urban folk—merchants, barbers, livery-stable men, doctors, lawyers, clerks, book-keepers, teachers, and the like had tarried in El Reno only briefly before setting out across the prairie for the town site waiting empty a hundred miles to the south-west.

Of the seventy thousand or so who did over-run El Reno this final July day, the greatest number were dirt farmers, enjoying the crowd but wishing secretly that they were already on their nice hundred-and-sixty acres. Most of the remainder were the men and women who, though strangers to one another as yet, looked forward to banding

together in lifelong community. Besides these, there were the government officials and employees supervising the lottery; the gamblers, thieves, whores and bawds, confidence men, grafters of every shade and variety, all already profitably engaged in their trades; there were the merely curious drawn from surrounding towns and farms by the holiday air; and finally, the townspeople themselves, toiling twenty-four hours a day to work out the last ounce of their bonanza.

Because they wanted first of all hotel rooms, the Dunbars and the Tyndalls remained together for almost a block before the two parties lost sight of each other in the mob.

Sawyer and Tony edged forward inch by inch toward the sign reading Hotel Foss which they could see hanging, seemingly unreachable, a block ahead. The vociferous thousands overflowed the walks and shuffled in the dust of the street. There was a solid mass of human beings from wall to wall the length of the way. The mood was one of flushed excitement, but the shuffling of the thousands was for the most part aimless, for they were men who had quit the hills and towns, the valleys and cities which they had always known, yet had not reached the new place they could begin to call home. The wooden canyon was loud with catcalls, palaver, and laughter, the blending noises of men agitated from a common cause: the triumph and agony of transition.

No vehicle could get through the press. Even men on horseback, such as the Territorial Governor and his aides, could not command a passage in the approaches to the main street and had to dismount blocks away.

The glittering sun raked the street. The faded blue shirts of the farmers turned a wet deep blue. Men in wool suits collapsed and were toted to the roasting shade between buildings. The dust-hazed air quivered. Paint blistered on the false two-storey fronts of the stores and resin oozed through. In the post office, against whose roof and walls the sun's rays pounded in a dry torrent, the fly-specked thermometer climbed steadily toward the 113 degrees it reached or surpassed every day for a week.

With the smell of unwashed bodies suffocating her, Sawyer wrenched an arm free to reach up and straighten her hat; it was hot to the touch. She tucked up a wave of hair and wondered that it did not snap off. Despite Tony's hand against the small of her back, urging her onward, it seemed she went forward one step and was pushed back two. The singing in her ears must be her brain bubbling . . .

"Tony," she gasped, "I can't stand it."

"For Christ's sake," shoving her forward impatiently, "stop belly-aching."

She glanced at him. He had spoken without erasing a half-smile from his face; his cinder-swollen eyes were alight with anticipation.

She followed the line of his gaze to a man standing high against the wall a few feet ahead. The man was on a box; his knees were on a level with the heads of the crowd. He was talking away at a great rate out of the corner of his mouth. In his hands was some kind of metal contrivance which he was manipulating while he urged the men gaping up at him to buy. The man caught Tony's eye. They exchanged waves.

And now Sawyer perceived that there were many such men atop boxes performing and wheedling and selling devices and nostrums. One held up an ivory-handled razor and cut a hair plucked from a young man's head. Another was industriously cleaning a piece of harness with a magic paste. There was a man selling psyllium for constipation, there were three or four swamped by purchasers of their palm-leaf fans, there was one with a board of chameleons, there were vendors with clusters of red and yellow balloons. From a contorted position a man who had let himself be bound in chains and leather straps was offering to bet anyone in the crowd that he could get himself free in one minute flat. Suddenly Sawyer remembered the face, by a scar, as that of a man with whom Tony had once talked on a sidewalk in Chicago or St. Louis or one of the other cities.

They passed below a wild-looking creature with a tangled beard standing on a packing crate. He stood with legs wide apart—barefoot. His hairy arms gesticulated from ragged sleeves and his bass voice roared warnings of eternal hellfire for these sinners who inched past him. To Sawyer at the moment a simple burning in hell seemed more a promise of relief than a threat of punishment.

Once by the hairy prophet, his exhortations still booming at them from behind, they found themselves working their way past a red-front café. Along its outside wall was pressed a queue of men waiting to get inside. Flies swirled in and out. From the interior spurted the notes of a fiddle and mouth harp, heard intermittently above the clatter and bang of dishes and tableware. The moist odour of cabbage and ham tantalised Sawyer's nostrils.

So great was the crush of men around the barrels of water placed on the corners—the town's regular water supply had long since surrendered—that Sawyer thought they would never make their way past them.

And when they were something like ten deep from the entrance to the Hotel Foss, which turned out to be a three-storey sandstone structure, they were forced at last to a stop. There was going on here a tug-of-war in reverse, a sort of push-of-war. Those trying to get out were just as determined as those trying to get in.

Occasionally, a battered individual, by virtue of a happy combination of pressures exerted willy-nilly against his rear and sides, would be somehow rammed through, and would be cheered for his success. But for the most part the jam of human carcasses was, as the wag in the crowd put it, enough to make a greased pig sit down and cry.

The crowd was not angry or surly. It was full of laughter and good nature, and was rather enjoying the contest.

Just as Sawyer thought she would faint if the squeeze against her did not relent, two pistol shots burst up the street somewhere, followed by a simultaneous exchange of three more shots. The crowd outside the hotel swung their heads in that direction. They saw nothing, but in the next instant were galvanised into a stampede. The frenzy to get in off the street could not be withstood by the comparative rationality inside the hotel.

Sawyer felt her backbone squashed against her insides; then she was thrust upward and forward. She had only a glimpse of imitation marble pillars as she was sped through the lobby. Her feet lagged and she shot headlong to the white tile floor. She pushed away trampling feet. Tony plunging by put one hand around her waist and half dragged, half lifted her until they were slammed against the desk.

"A room for two!" said Tony.

"Ha!" exploded the clerk in Tony's face.

To Sawyer, hanging on to the edge of the desk, the clerk's hair looked as if he had pulled out patches of it. A forelock splayed down his dripping brow, almost to his red eyes. From his upper pocket stuck a pair of shattered glasses, and his hands trembled as they absently riffled the pages of the register, overrun with names hastily scrawled. "Ha!" he croaked again.

"Where'll we sleep?" pleaded Tony.

"Out on the prairie," cried the clerk, waving wildly. "It won't rain. It won't rain *never*! Ha!"

"For the lady at least!" said Tony, shoving a ten-dollar bill into his hand.

The white fingers closed convulsively on the bill. His eyes rolled over to Sawyer.

"Share with the six women in Room 322, if they'll have you," moaned the clerk. "No, don't register. Just go. Go!"

Reeling up the two flights of stairs ahead of Tony, Sawyer knew she was going to laugh. The farcical attempt of the clerk to convince her that he had been driven insane—he was too preposterous to be believed. Her mind had been giddy with hot confusion, but even though at this moment the stairs ahead were curling upward and back over her head, she could see now with clarity the whole journey for what it was. The

clerk, pretending to be beleaguered, had been too utterly bizarre—he had so overdone his bit as to give the whole show away. She began to giggle, but it wasn't enough, and she began to snicker, trying to keep it down like hiccups, and then she quit trying to stop, and by the time they had reached the third-floor landing she was shouting with laughter. She knew the laughter spouting out of her would never end and she didn't want it to. Why, it was all a grotesque fantasy. It was all a ludicrously festive, hilariously monstrous extravaganza in which everyone was acting out a howlingly funny rôle. It was all a piece of side-splitting buffoonery, the most comical she could ever hope to take part in. The little round balloon men, the men dressed like farmers who had boosted her through the train window, the withered idiot, the hairy barefoot man, the conductor with the ferocious false moustache, the—oh, all of them, they were magnificent! But that burlesque clerk! He took the cake! The very Prince of Clowns!

Tony, lugging her small grip, had to help her up the last three steps, she was so weak from laughing. A family resting in the wicker furniture of the alcove-lobby at the head of the stairs looked away embarrassed. Plainly they were people who did not approve of drinking. Sawyer wanted to point at them with the command, "It's your turn. Perform! Perform!"

Tony guided her round the corner out of their sight and she staggered and wove down the corridor; except for her high laughter, the hall was quiet and empty, a cathedral quiet after the hullabaloo outside.

"It is fun, isn't it?" whispered Tony, squeezing her waist. "And it's only the beginning."

"Only the *beginning*?" she shouted, and she burst into another peal of laughter. "Oh my God, bring me cap and bells, bring me a castanet. Let me dance. I'll play the dancer!" And she spun away from him and whirled down the hall.

He overtook her, and dropping the grip, he seized her in his arms and embraced her.

"Oh Tony," she cried. She threw her arms round his neck and kissed his face furiously and hysterically, her lips clinging to his sticky cheeks.

"I don't believe it," she gasped. "I don't believe a moment of it."

"I believe it," Tony muttered. "And I want you. You make me want you. It seems ages. I thought we'd have a room together."

"But it's all a play! Nothing really happens."

"Doesn't it?"

He was walking her backward, and she bumped against a half-open door. It led into a dark broom closet. He pushed her in and she tripped awkwardly over mops and pails. "Why are you——?" she stammered. "No!" But he had leaned out and was yanking the door shut. In the

stifling blackness she heard him stumble over the mops toward her. He clawed up her clothes and clasped her and pressed her upright against the hard edges of the shelves. "I can't breathe in here——" "Shut up!" She wanted to fall, but he held her up angrily . . .

When they had come back into the hall, she leaned against the daisy-papered wall and stared at him.

"Why?" she asked.

He wiped her face with his extra handkerchief and mopped his own face with it and wrung it out. "I don't know." He reached down for her grip. "You got me, that's all. Raving excited like that. Oh hell, I don't know. It was what I wanted. Any complaints?"

She went down the hall, her eyes sliding without comprehension over the numbers on the doors.

"Here we are," said Tony behind her. He knocked on a door.

It was opened by a white-haired woman wearing black. "Only ladies in here," she said sharply.

Tony beckoned to Sawyer and she returned.

"My wife, ma'am. The clerk sent her. Will it be all right?"

"Why, you're ill, girl!" exclaimed the woman. "Why, you're near sunstroke. Come right in, dear, and get off your hat. This terrible heat—a fright. Never saw anything like this in Tennessee. I'll take your wife's bag, sir. I was telling my Eugene this morning, if this is any sample—I'd let you come in, sir, but so many ladies. You just go over there and lie down, dear, that cot will be yours. Yes sir?"

"I wanted to tell my wife——"

"Your husband wants to tell you something, dear. Dear, I said——"

"I'll run around a few hours and look the town over, sweet," said Tony. "You get a good rest. Try and get some sleep."

She half opened her mouth to reply, though she had no idea what she expected to say, but he was gone. The woman in black closed the door.

Someone was shaking her shoulder.

"Your husband's outside, dear."

Sawyer raised to a sitting position. The glare at the window blinded her momentarily.

"What time is it?"

"Almost four. You've slept nearly six hours."

"Six hours!" She swung her feet to the floor and reached for her shirtwaist hanging on the back of a chair. "In the middle of the day?"

"You were exhausted, girl. Mighty near to hysteria."

She seemed to recall that when she came in here the room had been filled with old and middle-aged ladies who hovered about her. Now

there was only a chunky woman sitting by the window darning a stocking and the white-haired woman in black who, she remembered faintly, had given her name as Mrs. Thornton and had said something about being in mourning for a sister.

They had all tried to get her to lie down, but she had insisted on doing something. What had it been? Oh. *Bathe*! She looked at her hands. They were clean, gloriously clean.

She remembered the women had all kept saying the bathroom was at the other end of the floor and that the water was changed only after every twenty-fifth person. "You simply can't go there," Mrs. Thornton had said, "but there's a coloured girl, the chambermaid, who'll bring a pail of water from somewhere for fifty cents. It's outrageous, blast her, but you can take a scotch bath behind that sheet we've hung up. It's what we've all done."

And she had stood in a galvanised washtub behind the curtain—oh she remembered that!—lifting a soaked towel and letting the water stream deliciously down her fevered body.

Buttoning her shirtwaist, Sawyer rose to take up her skirt. It had been pressed, and so had her jacket.

"They were so wrinkled," smiled Mrs. Thornton. "All I had to do was put the iron on the window ledge for half an hour."

"Oh thank you," said Sawyer. She noticed she had put on clean drawers and petticoat and stockings after the bath. Thank heavens, she had had extra underthings in her grip.

The chunky woman at the window chirped a greeting and went to a trunk with her darning basket. Sawyer strolled over the window. Narrowing her eyes, she looked out as she hooked her skirt.

The dull roar rising drew her gaze downward. The crowds flowed in from the side streets like creeks into a river. For the first time she noticed the red-white-and-blue bunting decorating the cornices of the buildings and the flags hanging limp from staffs. The gravelled tar on the flat roofs was a melted black. Sun stars sparkled from bits of tin and glass. The residences extending away from the business district could only be glimpsed beneath the foliage of elms and maples. Three blocks away she could see the red depot. The passenger train stood in the station waiting to start its return journey northward. It had brought her this far in her life—and soon she would go on, unpredictably, but it would continue its existence on schedule . . . To the left of the depot, a shunting engine was labouring with freight cars crouched on a skein of tracks which spurred silvery on to the prairie. A freight train rounding the curve into town came into her view. The latest arrivals were thick on the boxcars and gondolas. Steam plumed from the locomotive; seconds later the triumphant whistle reached her ears . . . On the prairie

beyond was spread the encampment, arcing the town like an army laying siege. Far over the landscape canvassed vehicles crawled away southward like small vessels beating out of harbour, until on the horizon the sails wavered and vanished in the streamers of heated air quivering into the whitish-blue sky.

All this spread beneath her *was* real, she saw now, as sharply real as if cut into steel. Beyond the gaseous horizon lay her un-lived future, but she stood here on a solid island, and if she put a hand on the window ledge the burn would be actual.

Below her moved the throngs of people—her kind of people—who, like her, had come for the promise of a new beginning. She *had* endured the waiting. The time had come to begin her escape. She drew in a deep breath . . .

Tony stood outside the door grinning. He took off his derby and swept it low. "Madame," he said, "your dinner awaits."

The usual pretence of gallantry, when there was an onlooker—Mrs. Thornton, in this case.

He held out to Sawyer a condensed milk can filled with water. "See the piece of ice? How's that for a miracle?"

"If you don't mind," said Mrs. Thornton, "could I have my fifty cents back now? For your bath water. I hate to mention it, but——"

Sawyer lowered the can of water from her lips. Of Allen Dunbar's twenty dollars, how much might Tony have left? He had mentioned food—if he had spent his last penny——

"Certainly, madam." Tony pulled out a crumpled dollar bill.

"I'll get your change," said Mrs. Thornton.

"Forget the change," said Tony. "You've been kind to my wife. Come, my sweet."

As they went down the hall, hesitantly she asked, "Tony, do we—do you have any more money?"

"It's none of your business, is it? But that was the last of it, except for a couple of nickels."

"Then—I know it doesn't matter, but—why didn't you get the change from Mrs. Thornton?"

"Just a penny grabber, aren't you? If I had a million bucks I might have let the dame give me the fifty cents. But what could I do with just fifty cents? Anyway, I've got a friend who ought to be in town by now. He'll let me have some dough. I've been gamming for him. He'll turn up."

"You mean borrow more?"

"No," mockingly imitating her voice, "I don't mean borrow more. He'll give it to me. And if I don't run across him a man in his grave could make money in this town."

On the wicker table in the empty alcove lobby was a paper plate heaped with pork chops and black-eyed peas; beside it, a cup of vanilla hokey-pokey.

"See? I'll look after you. All you have to do is not bellyache. And I hope to Jesus you won't start whining because it's not on gold plates."

Silently, she sat down and began eating.

Tony flopped into a wicker chair, throwing one leg over an arm of it, and pulled out a copy of the *El Reno Daily*. "Sleep all right?" he asked.

"Yes. I hope you got to sleep somehow."

"I've been looking 'er over. I even registered for a farm."

"You—mean you're going to be a farmer? I thought you——"

Tony dropped his paper to his lap and stared as if she were insane.

"I've heard a lot of dumb things from you but that's the prize. Am I going to farm. Now what in the hell would I be a farmer for?"

"But you said——"

"Respectable thing to do—registering. Shows pioneer intentions." He leaned back and laughed, as if pleased with himself: "The line was twenty miles long, looked like, but a fellow near the head of it got sick, vomiting and so on, so I pitched in to help hold his head and so forth, quite a flurry all around, and by the time the thing quieted down, why, I was standing in line right at the tent. Got registered in a jiffy." He laughed again. "These rubes are putting on a great show."

He turned to the sports page and began reading, muttering half-aloud. "Connie Mack's Philadelphia dopes took Boston 13-10 yesterday. I'd still like to lay a little dough on Boston to cop the pennant. Remember the ball game in St. Louis on the Fourth? M-m-m-m . . . Pirates still out in front in the National . . . Whew-w-w! Cresceus trotted a two-two and a half at Columbus—a new mark. What a horse! Well, I see —"

He was in better humour now. This was as good a time as any to make her first move. Craftily, she put into her tone all the friendliness of which she was capable: "Tony."

"All right, what is it now?"

"Don't think I'm not having a wonderful time."

"Oh, I'm sure you are. A delicious, oh so happy time."

"But tell me, how long will we be here?"

"If you have to know, two, three days or so."

"Then—this may sound absurd to you——" She laughed to show she thought it rather absurd—"but I thought, just to pass the time, I might—get a job."

His eyes jerked up from his paper. "A what!"

She spoke rapidly. "Well, I noticed, as we came up the street, a good

many women were working in the stores and bazaars. There is so much to be done women have to help, I suppose, and I wondered why I shouldn't too."

"God Almighty, do you actually think I'd let you *work*?"

"Well, why not?"

"Why not? *My* wife work? Just as I'm about to start building a reputation for being a top-notch political figure? Have you gone completely out of your mind?"

"I mean just for two or three days. It would give us some extra money——"

"You're going to earn money for *me*?"

"Not that so much. I mean, just for the novelty of it. The experience. Just to see if I *could*. It wouldn't be anything I'd want to do permanently, I'm sure."

"Let me tell you one thing," said Tony coldly. "If I ever hear you even mention such a subject again, I'll kick your pants off."

Sawyer sat very erect and looked at him steadily, the first time she had managed such a look for a long time. "Nevertheless," she said, "I'll think I'll try it."

He got to his feet. The newspaper slid to the floor.

"You need another lesson, don't you?"

"No."

He gripped the edges of the table and leaned toward her, his eyes peering into her white face.

"Don't, Tony."

He spoke in a low, level voice. "You're a slut, a cheese-headed slut, a cheap stinker, a filthy pimple. You're a . . ." Accumulated and stored obscenities spilled from his lips and smeared into her. Evenly, monotonously, his eyes brightening, he droned his recital while she sat paralysed and shrivelled inside.

A man plodded up the stairs. Tony straightened and smiled at him as he passed. The man tipped his hat and went round the corner and down the hall. A door opened and closed. Tony leaned over the table, his eyes lighting again, and continued as if there had been no interruption.

". . . You're a puke-mouthed, you're a dirty——"

"Stop it."

Her chair clattered backward as she struggled to her feet.

"Stop it. I can't bear any more. You've got to stop it!"

"Shut up. Put down that fork."

Retreating, Tony coming round the table.

"I won't shut up. You can't do this. Leave me alone. Do you hear me? You've got to leave me alone."

"Put down that fork"

"I won't. You'll drive me crazy."

He shoved her and she fell to the wicker sofa, twisted sideways, the fork bouncing to the floor. She sobbed into her hands.

"For Christ's sake, do you want everybody in the hotel out here?"

"I don't care. I can't bear it any longer."

"Shut up."

"Tony, Tony, please——"

He got her plate and put it on the sofa seat beside her. He picked up the fork and laid it on the plate.

"Go ahead and eat."

"I don't want anything more."

"God damn it, eat it."

"Go away. Just go away from me."

"All right. But eat it."

She stared down at the plate. After a while she lifted her head. Cigarette smoke drifted around the corner. He was leaning against the wall, out of sight, waiting. She stared at the plate again . . .

"Finished?" He stood beside her. "Get up."

She got to her feet. He took out his wadded damp handkerchief.

"Wipe your eyes."

She wiped them, and her nose.

"Now come on."

"I think I'll go back to my room."

"You're coming with me. We're going to look 'er over some more. I want you to register for a farm. Be a good thing to be able to say later on—pioneer intention by both of us."

"I don't want to go anywhere with you."

"Don't be so snotty. Take my arm—and for Christ's sake straighten up. You look like something the cat dragged in. Watch the stairs. Why don't you try smiling once in a while. Do you think a man wants a wife who's always . . ."

When they walked out of the lobby into the sun Sawyer wearily thought of a roast being slid into an oven. At this hottest hour the exposed streets were not quite as crowded as they had been that morning. Wherever strips or spots of shade could be found, in the lee of buildings, in doorways, beneath a tree, there men had taken refuge from the dry storm.

They had gone only a short distance when they met Allen Dunbar, carrying under an arm a folded chair and holding in his hands a paper sack and brown jug. He started to lift the handle that held the jug to tip his hat, but apparently realised that would be awkward and forewent the courtesy.

"For George Potter," he said, explaining his load. "He's standing in line to register. It looks as if he'll be there till midnight."

Sawyer hardly heard him. For at that moment, with several men between her and him, she saw pass the Mr. Barney Foster, whom she had last seen in Washington. He was wearing a white "western" hat.

"Say!" exclaimed Tony at her side. "I just remembered some business down the street. Look after my wife a little while, will you, Dunbar?" He beamed at Sawyer. "Everything's going to be jake, sweetheart," a kiss on her cheek, "just like I told you."

Allen frowned after him, and Sawyer saw the frown but could not blame him for it. Her first thought was to return to her room, but Tony had instructed her to stay with Allen, and not to obey would give only give him an excuse to punish her later. Allen made the decision for her: "Let's go this way, shall we?"

In a more or less vacant area behind the row of main street buildings a long line of men wound sinuously around woodsheds, outhouses, and stacks of boxes. The line straightened across an open space and led into a square army tent. Sawyer saw officials at tables within entering registrations on cards. Quite a number of people were working up and down the line: ladies handing out temperance tracts, Canadian land agents with folders urging the coolness of dark forests, vendors of candy, hokey-pokey, and sandwiches, sellers of badges, canes, and balloons. At one side of the area a short line of women stood before another tent, some wearing sunbonnets and wash dresses, other "dressed up" in serge suits and hats unfashionably adorned with artificial flowers.

They found Potter toward the rear of the line of men, at a moment when he was shuffling forward another two steps. Hands stuffed in pockets, his head hanging dismally at the end of his long neck, he was the picture of an unhappy man. His eyes lit dully when he saw Allen.

"Thirsty?" said Allen. "Hungry?"

"Indeed yes," said Potter sadly.

Allen handed him the sack of sandwiches and jug of water and unfolded the chair. "Might as well be comfortable."

Disdainful whistles were fired at Potter as he sat in the chair. "Where's your parasol?" cried one man daintily and got the general laughter he hoped for.

A photographer with tripod and camera worked his way along the line. On the tripod was a placard: Roland Clayton Dince, Photographer Perfectionaire.

"Got your photo for your registration certificate?" he was asking shrilly. "Have to have your photo pasted on, you know. All your standing in line will go to naught if you ain't got it. Take it in thirty seconds. Bargain price to-day. One dollar only."

The spry, unshaven, little photographer was doing a thriving business, snapping the camera as clients posed in line, dipping the positive plates in a developing tin suspended under the camera, stuffing the dollar bills into his pockets. Coming to Potter, he elaborately set up the tripod.

"Don't get up, sir. Take it as you recline at ease. Always a pleasure to photograph a gentleman. Have to have your photo if you want to register."

Potter posed self-consciously, one hand thrust into his coat. Dince, fussing with his camera and plates, directed a stream of words at Allen and Sawyer.

"Your first trip to this country, young people? Third trip into the Territory for me. Guthrie in the Run of '89, I was there. Made the finest pitcher of the start of that horse race anybody got. Sold hundreds of that pitcher. Cherokee Strip in '93, made all kinds of pitchers there. But when it quieted down I pulled out. Couldn't stand it. This is a terrible country. Not fit for human beings. Want to know why I'm back again?"

"Why?" asked Allen.

"Filthy lucre, young man, that's why." Dince pulled out a plug of tobacco. "Chew?" Allen declined with thanks. Dince swiftly pushed back the stained bristles around his mouth and bit off a hunk. He continued as soon as he had the hunk nestled in his right cheek: "Nothin' like a wad of tobacco to bring contentment. Look at the cow. Is there anything as unruffled as the face of a cow? Why? Got a cud to chew on. Helps a man the same way." He snapped Potter's picture and dipped the plate into the developer. "Sad thing."

"What is?" asked Allen.

"All these men. How many of 'em will be shot—killed?"

"Killed?"

"Plenty of 'em. Men standing right here in this line. Murder, robbery, knifin', shootin'. You'll see. May be killed myself. Or you. Can't tell." He handed Potter his dripping likeness. "Here you are, sir, one dollar is the correct change, and thank you sir."

Dince started on, shrilling his spiel, but a man swinging down the line stopped to listen, then shouted, "This man's a fake. I just registered and didn't need any picture."

"What?" cried Dince, as amazed as the men in line. "Is that right? Have they changed the rules? I'll have to go find out about that. Wait right here, gentlemen."

He deftly tucked his tripod under his arm and ran toward the army tent. Reaching it, he changed his course and disappeared around a building beyond.

His victims roared with anger, helpless to leave their places to pursue

him. Those who had not been reached and so had not been taken in, also roared, but with laughter and much leg-slapping.

Potter eyed his portrait ruefully. "Well," he sighed, "at least I can send it to Lucy. It'll let her know I'm still alive."

Sawyer felt a sudden sympathy for this unhappy Potter. He doubtlessly was asking himself, "Why am I standing here in this sun trying to win a farm I don't want at all?" He so plainly was yearning for his stool in the quiet office of the drygoods house, where it was shady and cool and there was no wondering about what would happen tomorrow because it would be not different from what happened yesterday, and all would be secure and even and safe.

Tony had said he wanted her to register for a farm. She glanced at the women's line. If she did it now, she wouldn't have to come back with him later.

But Allen was ready to go.

"Lots of those men don't look like farmers," she said as they walked away. "Are they?"

"Probably not," said Allen. "The first farm drawn will be worth fifty thousand dollars, so they say, and men who have no idea of farming would like to hold the ticket for that one."

"Worth so much? Why?"

"It's a plum. Under the way the law is written the town will be permitted to expand in only one direction for five years. One adjacent farm, available to the person whose name is first drawn, may be subdivided as an addition to the town—and the townsite was purposely made smaller than will probably be needed. It is," he added, "an extra attraction of this extraordinary circus being staged for the pleasure of those who are made delirious by the prospect of getting something for nothing. And it would just be George Potter's luck to—— Oh, good heavens."

He had looked back as he spoke. Sawyer turned, too. Potter apparently had acceded to the request of the man ahead of him for a drink out of his jug. Now the jug was passing on up the line, tilted at each mouth it came to, while Potter leaned out of his chair and watched its swinging departure with dismay.

Sawyer held a gloved fist to her mouth, but Allen began laughing, so she went ahead and laughed too.

To laugh again! Her throat caught. She coughed to cover it, then laughed once more to make it evident that the interruption had been caused by nothing more than a cough.

"Well," said Allen, "I've got to get back to the freight yards."

She said nothing. Back to her hotel room now, her little excursion over.

"If you like, though, you might enjoy watching the unloading," he was saying.

Excruciating but wonderful: to be spoken to pleasantly and courteously. Whether he meant the invitation wasn't important; the inflection was all that mattered.

"I might?"

"We've set up a tent—we couldn't get into the hotel—and you could sit in the shade of it. Of course, if you'd rather return to your hotel . . ."

Stay away as long as you can, as long as you possibly can.

"I think I should like to see the freight yards."

At first the busy scene seemed to Sawyer to be little more than a continuation of the confusion of the downtown streets. There was a tumult of shouting, of escaping steam and clanging bells, of vociferous livestock, of sweating men in shirtsleeves wrestling furniture, household goods, barrels, boxes, merchandise of all kinds, into wagons standing about everywhere.

Sawyer sat on a stool in the entrance to the Dunbar's wall tent, not far from where Allen and his father and brothers and half a dozen other men were transferring the contents of two boxcars to eight great freight wagons.

The freight train she had seen entering town an hour before was being broken up and its cars shoved down one spur or another. Cattle lowed in slatted cars coasting along two tracks away. Farther off, a flock of sheep bleated their objections to the ramps. Chickens clucked and clacked in a poultry car somewhere behind her. Whips cracking and drivers yelling farewells, four canvassed freighters detached themselves from the disorder and lumbered in single file out on to the prairie and headed southwest.

The sounds here were somehow different, though, from those of the streets. The men there had been boisterous without purpose. Theirs had been a kind of hands-in-pockets gaiety; they were mainly waiting for something to happen. Here men were getting arms and backs into it. There was a rhythm to it, the rhythm of purposeful toil. What at first had been a confusion of noises, shouts, orders, and heave-ho's really possessed an underlying harmony which, she sensed, might at any moment rise to a chorus of song, the way sailors are supposed to do when hoisting a sail.

Vaguely, she rather wished Tony were here. Not the present Tony, the other Tony—the one she had thought was Tony. Doing this kind of work. This *our* tent, then, he supervising the unloading of our household things, the way Allen Dunbar is checking off a list over there, Tony's goods in a car about to be opened, he in business like these

other hard-working people, pausing to wipe his brow, looking over here and grinning. The piano being carefully brought out of that car yonder, ours, and there will be an evening when I will play and he will stand behind me with his hands on my shoulders, singing "After the——"

She grimaced. What piano? Not even a chair do we own. We own nothing but the clothes on our backs and our pockets are empty. Tony working here, like these people? What a joke. Nothing I want could he give me.

Nothing she wanted. But just what did she want?

"I don't know what *you* want," Overton Dunbar had said, but his inflection had taken for granted that she had a goal of some sort. "Everybody on this train wants something—and I know what I want."

She squinted against the sunlight and studied Overton Dunbar as he worked in shirtsleeves. What did he want? Mostly it seemed from what he had said he wanted to get away from where—and what?—he had been. "We're escaping fugitives," he had said. Escaping. Well, that much would be true of her. She had been in flight for some time now. She had wanted to escape the brown house, and she had. She had wanted to escape girlhood and reach womanhood, and she had done that. She had escaped the shocks and humiliations of St. Louis, Chicago, Kansas City, and now she desperately wished to escape her bondage under Tony. But if she escaped, then what did she want her life to be like?

Oh I'm no good at thinking, she said to herself. I only know that here am I, Sawyer Bolton—Sawyer Tyndall, rather—sitting on a stool by some railroad tracks. And if I were asked how I got here I would say on a train, but as to how it *really* all came about, I've no more idea than I have of why Mr. Dunbar and Allen are coming this way. I only know that I've been flying from a *now*, and part of it I'm continually leaving behind but there's always the last of it with me, and I imagine that I have that much in common with about everybody in this place, but they are looking forward to something more, and I'm going to have it, too, I don't care what I have to do to get it . . .

"Would you like to help us out a little?" asked Overton Dunbar as he strode up with Allen.

"I'd be glad to," she said.

He pulled a sheaf of half-sheets from his hip pocket. "Take Allen's list and call it off to him so he can check what we've already got out against these invoices." He told Allen that he himself was going to see some horse dealer or other about hiring teams to be turned back after the new town was reached. He looked at the half dozen men loading his wagons. "Hope those fellows can handle teams. Queer assortment, though. Kid doctor just out of school, an ex-soldier, short-order cook, two steel puddlers, and an Indiana farm boy. The farm boy

ought to do all right." Then, without warning: "Your husband getting set, Mrs. Tyndall?"

"Oh yes! He's—Oh yes."

"What's his line? I don't believe I heard."

"He's— Oh, he's registered for a farm."

"Farmer? Didn't know he was a farmer."

Allen flipping intently through the invoices.

A quick swallow, a smile: "Oh, he has a number of things in mind. He's talking business with a man now. He's very enthusiastic. He's sure to do well."

"Absolutely!"

Dunbar hurried off. Allen pulled up a keg beside her and handed her a list. Her pounding heart made the paper in her fingers tremble; she laid the paper in her lap.

"Just go down the list slowly," said Allen.

She began calling off the articles as he riffled back and forth through the invoices.

Hammers, saws, planes, chisels, steeples, nails, paint, fixtures, barbed wire, hog fencing . . . *Farmhouses will be built and the land fenced in, the livestock made captive . . .* Wash tubs, monkey stoves, cooking utensils, knives, forks, cups, plates, churns, crockware . . . *And the men will come in for dinner, and the women who have worked and cooked will pass the food to them . . .* Ploughs, harrows, discs, go-devils, spades, sickles . . . *And the sod will be turned, the fields planted . . .* Lanterns, horse blankets, Franklin stoves, grates, storm sashes . . . *And winter will come, though that seems hard to believe now . . .* Denim work shirts and trousers, work shoes, cotton gloves, bandanas . . . *And the toil will go on and on, everlasting . . .*

"Sawyer . . ."

The petitioning inflection of Allen's voice caused her to look at him quickly.

"I hope you don't mind my calling you Sawyer," he said. "We're something of old friends set down in a strange land, aren't we?"

"Of course, Allen," she said crisply; his tone made her uneasy.

"I only wanted to say if—there is anything you— That is, if there is anything I can—"

Her hardening gaze stopped him. He floundered. "It seems incredible, Allen," she said with dignity, "but could it be that you are implying you fancy me in some kind of difficulty and are trying to proffer aid?"

"Well—"

"That is so nonsensical as to be almost funny. Oh, I'm grateful for your solicitude, but really I've never been happier in my life. Tony

and I are finding this exciting and we are looking forward to all of it. I just can't *imagine* how you——"

"Well, let's forget it. I——"

She smiled with cool sympathy. "Your faculty for misjudging people and situations must cause you all kinds of embarrassment, doesn't it? We'd better get ahead with these papers. I mustn't stay too long."

They finished after a few more minutes and Allen returned to the boxcars. Her eyes following him, Sawyer breathed a sigh of satisfaction: she at least had enough left in her to repulse an offer of charity from the last person in the world she would want to extend it. How could he be so intuitive as to suspect that she was in trouble? Or was it intuition? Did she betray herself? She took a mirror from her pocket-book and studied her face—it was drawn and tired and white. She tried futilely to relax her facial muscles.

Fremont and Tad sauntered over. The manner of eighteen-year-old Fremont was both furtive and gruffly assertive. "I have charge of our personal food supplies crossin' the prairie. How about checking over this stuff in the tent with me?"

It occurred to Sawyer that Fremont had previously checked the things he was responsible for—there was a light pencilled checkmark beside each item on the list she held—and that he was aping Allen's little chore with her to show off before her.

"... one case of canned peaches, one case of canned tomatoes, two boxes of salt, one box of pepper, three boxes of soda . . ."

"We don't need to check what *I* had charge of," said Tad scoffingly. "I know exactly what's here. Look, Mrs. Tyndall."

With a flourish he opened a walnut case. There were guns and ammunition in it.

"This is a 30-30 Winchester rifle. It's Daddy's. This is a .38 revolver Allen carried in the Philippines. There's 100 rounds for the rifle and 50 rounds for the pistol. And *this*," he proclaimed, holding it up, "is a single-shot Stevens .22 rifle. It's brand new, 'cause Daddy just gave it to me. Fremont don't get a gun. Daddy gave him just a hunting knife, because Fremont is too reckless to let have a gun."

Fremont glowered. "You shut up, you little baby!" Furious, he glanced sidewise at Sawyer to see how she had reacted to the unflattering remark.

"Tell me, Tad," Sawyer said suddenly, "are you looking forward to going to the new town?"

"Sure."

"Why?"

Tad chewed on a thumb. "Well, gosh, lots of reasons."

"Name one reason, Tad."

"Well, one *big* thing, I won't have old Miss Buford any more."

"Who's Miss Buford?"

"My old teacher. She's awful. I'm glad to get away from her."

"But your teacher in the new town, isn't it possible she'll be just as bad?"

Tad shook his head emphatically. "Nobody could be as bad as Miss Buford. Everything's going to be different. Daddy says so."

There it was again. Whatever lay ahead would be better than what they had left. They all believed it.

"Besides," said Tad, "I've got *plans*, and in a *new* town, I can *do* 'em."

"That's fine, Tad. It's fun having plans for yourself, isn't it?"

"Sure. Well," he sighed, "to work."

She went over to the freight wagons with the boys.

"I think I'd better get back," she said to Allen. "My husband may be wanting me."

"I'll take you," said Allen.

Mr. Dunbar came up. He was frowning: "I ran across the yard superintendent and he tells me mine is about the fortieth hardware outfit to unload the last ten days. Think there's anything to that?"

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Allen.

Dunbar jerked a mangled rubber band from his mouth and threw it away. "Somebody's going broke. But not me!" He thrust a new band into his mouth. "Let 'em all come. It's every man's right. So long as we don't have Wall Street monopolies crushing us. I'll compete with 'em and whip 'em at every turn."

"I'll be back," said Allen.

She and Allen were pushing through the crowd a half block from the hotel. A pistol shot exploded some fifteen feet ahead. The crowd emitted startled cries and swirled and cleared the area.

As Sawyer was pulled back by Allen she saw a man sprawled on the red brick walk. In a dying spasm he rolled over on his back and flung out his right arm. A padlock fell from his hand. There was a hole in his forehead and his jaw hung down. In that first instant it struck Sawyer that Tony looked not unlike George Potter sleeping with his mouth open on the train.

CHAPTER TEN

BARNEY FOSTER was standing on the corner across from the Hotel Foss in the morning sun when Ollie Cook drifted by with the crowd. Foster did not look at Ollie but as the dapper six-footer brushed past they exchanged four quick sentences.

Ollie continued across the street and entered the hotel. Foster went into a cigar store two doors down.

When Foster came out a couple of minutes later he glanced up at the windows of the second floor of the hotel. He slipped the band from his cigar and scratched a match on the arm of the wooden Indian. As he lighted up, he glanced at the second floor again. Ollie Cook appeared at an open window. Ollie took out a handkerchief and wiped his hands.

Foster crossed the street, forced his way through the lobby and climbed a flight. He went down the hall until he came to an open door and turned in.

Ollie greeted him with an outstretched hand. They shook, and Foster bolted the door.

"Sit down wherever you can find space," said Ollie. "Sleeping eight in a room makes a mess."

Foster glanced at the disorder. Clothing was scattered over the chairs. He went to the window and pulled it down.

"We'll roast," said Ollie.

"But the window above might be open," said Foster. He put his solid bulk on the nearest of two unmade beds and leaned back against the head. "You're looking good, Ollie. I like that grey vest."

Ollie scowled and flicked a speck of dust from it. "It's got no life to it," he complained.

"It won't matter how you dress now. Because of certain developments, I've changed the plan so far as you're concerned."

Ollie's eyes narrowed. "Yeah?"

"You're going to stay in the background. You're going to be top dog there—in the background. You're not going to be in the city administration. You aren't even going to get acquainted with the respectable people in the administration."

"What's the deal? How do I cash in?"

"I'm upping your share."

"That's all I want to hear. I was dreading tryin' to be a city official. You say I don't have to wear no dingy vest no more?"

"No. Now let's make it snappy. One of your room-mates might come back."

Ollie took out a folded paper.

"I wrote it all out for you. The girls were easy. But I had to see a hell of a lot of saloonkeeps. It takes an investment and a lot of 'em just didn't have the dough to make the move. But maybe I got more than there'll be trade for at that."

Foster looked over the list. He whistled. "I'll say you've been working. Think all these will come?"

"Some of 'em are already there. I've seen some more of 'em around here. I made it look pretty rosy."

Foster handed back the paper. "I'll guarantee they'll do all right. You didn't mention me to anybody?"

"No."

"Slim Carver's in town. I saw him on the street yesterday. Seen anything of Gottlieb?"

"Jerry Horner's here. He said Gottlieb loaded his stock and headed out day before yesterday. Horner's still waitin' for his."

"You and Horner didn't get clubby out in public?"

"It was after dark last night. I followed him to an alley."

"Tony thought he saw Frank Everett somewhere in the crowd."

Ollie laughed. "So that punk Tyndall got his."

"Yes."

"Did they find out who done it?"

"Some damned sucker or other. These rubes would probably give him a medal anyway."

"So would I. I knew that punk wouldn't last till——"

"You've noticed the choice variety of pitch and shell and three-card monte dealers in town? Tony didn't do so bad. I want you to do the single O on them from now on."

"Oh Christ. That bastard, I knew he——"

"Forget it. I'm burying Tony this morning and that's the end of it."

Ollie's plucked eyebrows went up. "You're paying for his funeral?"

"I feel bad about him. I turned him down for some dough yesterday. Didn't want him to get the habit. I wish now I'd let the kid have it."

"Where's his chicken?"

"She's all right."

"If it was me and the punk had did me the way he done you by gettin' himself kilt I'd have left him lay where he lay."

"Two things in politics, Ollie, you always pay attention to. A new baby and a funeral. I'd feel uncomfortable if I didn't plant the boy decently. There's a loyalty even in politics."

"Besides which," said Ollie, "the widow is good-looking."

Foster glanced at him obliquely. "You're smart, Ollie."

Ollie grinned. "That don't take bein' so smart. But you're a lot older than her, ain't you?"

"You think I'm an old man?" Foster's green eyes drilled him.

"No," faltered Ollie. "But she's younger anyhow. And I figure maybe she's—it just might be hard to pull off, that's all."

"I've got plenty of time."

"But why waste time on a chicken? I've got a hundred you could

"You're smart in a way, Ollie. But remember I'm smarter any day in the week. I know what I want."

Ollie scowled. "Well, I guess maybe it'd be pretty good," he admitted sullenly.

Foster took out his watch.

"It's getting on toward funeral time. I'll see you in the new town." His slap on Ollie's back was warm. "You're doing all right."

Ollie's scowl gave way to a pleased smirk.

Foster opened the door a crack, peered into the hall, then went out quickly and started up another flight toward the third floor.

Sawyer had been sitting in the alcove lobby for ten minutes when she saw Foster nearing the head of the stairs. With her was Mrs. Thornton. Sawyer had on Mrs. Thornton's weeds; a long crepe veil covered her face.

"You met Mrs. Thornton last night," said Sawyer as she rose.

Mrs. Thornton pressed Sawyer's hand. "I'd go with you but my Eugene's waiting for me. I know you'll be all right."

"Nice day," said Foster, as Mrs. Thornton left them.

"Yes," said Sawyer. "The others in the room, though . . ."

They went downstairs. As they reached the first floor, Sawyer stopped abruptly. Across the crowded lobby she saw Allen Dunbar. Like a number of other men sitting in lobby chairs, he was reading a newspaper. That newspaper!

"Mr. Foster, isn't there a way out besides the front door?"

"I think so," said Foster.

A short hall took them into the kitchen. Cooks and dishwashers looked up. Again, Sawyer stopped suddenly.

"I forgot," she said. "I'm not going to run any more."

Foster glanced at her curiously.

They retraced their steps. She went directly across the lobby to Allen Dunbar and greeted him. He got hastily to his feet.

"Good morning," he said. "I didn't know whether to go up again or not . . . I was waiting . . ."

"Yes?"

"Father wanted me to express his deepest sympathies. And if there is anything I——"

"There's nothing, I think. Mr. Foster here—oh, you two don't know each other——" She waited while they shook hands. "Mr. Foster has arranged everything." A little pause. "You were reading the story?"

She certainly had read it. One of the women in the room, the spare, angular one, had laid it on the washstand where she would be certain to see the headline as she dressed: CON MAN SLAIN. And: "A cheap crook of the sort infesting El Reno this week got his just reward when a victim, who afterward made himself scarce without reason, shot him a dose of lead. The crook . . ."

"The editor who wrote that should be whipped!" said Allen.

"Why?" said Sawyer. "It's true, isn't it?"

"What?"

"Why blame anyone for telling the truth?"

"I—that is . . ."

She held out her hand. "You've been kind—and it's nice of you to pretend."

He took her hand briefly, then stared after her as she went out with Foster.

The undertaking parlour was also a furniture store, operated by one Sam Jones, whose name was in black across the pink front. Jones was waiting on a customer when they came in, but he turned the customer over to a clerk and hustled to them.

"Come right in, young lady. Come in, sir. We're all ready as soon as the preacher gets here. Rodale's always late. Just sit on that divan, young lady. How's it feel? Finest red plush available, only twenty-three-fifty for it and those two green plush chairs go with it—biggest bargain in the Territory. That's right. Just lean back comfortable. Will you be seated there, sir? How's that spring construction? Patented. Awful hot for a funeral, ain't it? Sad thing, young lady, all my sympathy. I say men with guns ought not to be tolerated in a civilised community. You fixed for your furniture in the new town, sir?"

Foster bit hard on a cigar. "I'm not interested in furniture to-day," he said.

"Oh, course not. No rush." He hitched up his pants under his coat and expelled a whistling sigh through puckered lips. A dumpy man, he had the darting eyes that go with garrulity.

"Oh—oh, there's Charlie signallin' me from the embalmin' room. Everything's ready. Got the young man laid out in a coffin. Sorry we didn't have no better on hand, sir, though I can guarantee it's the finest silk lining and them German silver handles, you can't tell no difference from sterling, but we had three killin's this week just as my

coffin stock was low and ole Mr. Fuequard had to go and die of sun-stroke day before yesterday. Looks like he could have been considerate enough to wait till next week at least. Ain't never sold so much furniture in one week, neither. Like I say, everything seems to come at once. If you'll just step this way, young lady and sir, you can have your look. Did a right nice job, I think you'll say, though the nature of the fatality made it so that—well, no point in getting technical. Secrets of the trade, you know. I think you'll say he looks just as natural as life."

The assistant, Charlie, stood by the open door at the rear. The odour of formaldehyde seeped out.

"Go right in, young lady. There's the coffin on the table there."

Sawyer drew back. She could not go in that room and look at him—not with the thoughts in her mind that she could not dismiss.

"Will you see that everything's all right, Mr. Foster?"

"Of course." He strode over to the coffin, glanced down briefly, and returned. "He looks all right."

"Here's Rodale," boomed Jones. "We can start if you're ready."

The preacher introduced himself and murmured his sympathies. Jones led the way out the back door. In the alley Charlie and a clerk lifted the coffin into a black hearse. Behind the hearse waited a carriage with the driver's seat high and a black fringed top over the rear seat.

"Rodale'll sit up beside Charlie on the hearse. I'll drive you, sir, and the young lady. Go ahead, Charlie. He knows the way very well. We'll keep to the alleys if you don't mind. No disrespect for the dead intended, but we'd never get through the streets, they're so jammed. Have trouble gettin' across from alley to alley as 'tis."

Sawyer was conscious that the carriage was going along a sandy road, that the black hearse was fifty feet ahead and that the sere prairie was yellow in the sunlight. But inside herself, where previously there had been an emotional tumult, there was only a dream-like floating.

She had wept much the night before. Mrs. Thornton had hovered and comforted and clucked and murmured while the other women sat apart and talked in low voices among themselves. One had decided to read aloud from her Bible, and there had been a satisfaction in her voice as she read of the criminals who had hung beside Jesus and of His promise that they would that day be with Him in Paradise. But Sawyer had not cared, she was racked with sobs.

Why had she wept so, she wondered now.

There had been the shock striking her like a sledge-hammer blow after Allen brought her to her room and murmured an explanation to the women, and departed softly saying he would return to where Tony

lay. Return to where Tony lay . . . And she had fallen to the cot and hysteria had seized her. But had the weeping been for Tony?

Allen had come back, but she had not been in a condition to see anyone then. Later—how much later she did not know except that it had become dark and she was sitting up, drinking a broth which Mrs. Thornton had brought—Mr. Foster had come. Talking with him had not been the same as seeing Allen Dunbar would have been. She would have been helpless before Allen's courteous charity. Mr. Foster, though, had been Tony's "best friend"—Tony had so identified him in the restaurant in Washington—and it had been Mr. Foster whom Tony had followed to see on business earlier in the day. It was right that Mr. Foster should come to discuss the funeral of his friend and to comfort his friend's widow.

Allen had returned still later, so Mrs. Thornton had told her this morning, but Sawyer had been asleep by that time . . .

A troubled sleep: she lay on a bier in flowing white, serene and at rest at last, and as Tony came and looked down at her alabaster face she felt a joy for the expression of grief that was sure to torture his face. But instead he laughed contemptuously . . .

All her weeping . . . strange that she had wept. She had not the slightest wish to weep now. Had she wept mostly for what could never be? For that hope which had lingered and to which she had clung: that his brutality would pass, and that at last somehow he would stand forth shining and kind and good as he *must* have been when her heart ached with love for him?

Wept for Tony?

. . . or for herself.

Why weep for herself? She had known for some time that the situation would have to end in death for one of them, and she had taken for granted that she would be the one to die. Why weep for herself, now that it had been decided she would be the one to live?

An excruciatingly beautiful thought went through her mind, and it seemed to embrace all the knowledge man had searched for, and, she thought, if only I had pencil and paper I could write it out so the world could read it and see it for the truth: "*Down through the blackness into which you threw me I have been falling, falling in terror, and now you have smashed me against the bottom of the pit and I lie broken in glimmering pain.*" How sad, how beautiful, she thought. I will not hate him, she said to herself, for he is dead. I will only forget he ever was . . .

No, Sawyer, you'll not forget. You will remember steamy windows, the rain slashing against them, the waiter bowing over the bottle of wine. "Your hair—what colour would you say it is?" You will not

forget dancing on a balcony. When will you forget the tenderness with which he embraced you on your wedding night? The boxes heaped around you, and his smile, his anxious brown eyes . . .

There was a young girl who knew those things, not I. And the young girl is dead now. She died of foul whisperings in her ear, of laughter ridiculing her pleading, of slaps and kicks as she lay dying. *She* would have wept for him once, but the dead cannot weep for the dead. How true: the dead cannot weep for the dead. Let them lie in the grave together. I am a woman, alive and free—I rose from their ashes and they cannot touch me.

Words from Mr. Foster swirled slowly in the carriage.

"Tell me, Sawyer, had Tony ever talked to you about me?"

"Oh yes. He called you his best friend."

"I'm grateful for that. I'm a pretty shrewd judge of character and I had a real liking for the boy."

You're no better judge of character than I was, she thought.

"He had a tendency toward wildness, perhaps—let's call it high spirits——"

You may call it what you will.

"——I planned to come to this country and suggested Tony come out too. I thought that out here, given a real chance, his abilities might come out."

Oh, he had ability—ability to make even a sagacious man like you think he might amount to something.

"——And that's why, dear Sawyer, I feel responsible for your welfare now."

"I don't know what I'd have done without your help," she said. "Oh yes, I do. I'd have lived."

"Beg pardon?"

"I'm grateful for your help."

"But it's the future we must consider now. Do you have any plans?"

"One."

"To return home?"

"I haven't any home to return to."

"Ah—yes. Tony told me something of that. Well, why not go on to the new town?"

"I intend to. That's my one plan."

"What do you expect to do?"

"I don't know. But I must go there."

"Well, maybe we could arrange, say, a nice millinery shop for you ——" Sawyer said nothing. "Or something in the city hall—I expect to have some influence—maybe a job as typist for you. Many

young women of good breeding are entering the business world, you know——”

“Or,” said Sawyer, “perhaps I could operate a locomotive or be a cowgirl.”

“Beg pardon?”

“You’re being thoughtful, Mr. Foster, but nothing so ordinary as making hats or running a typewriter awaits me. I can’t tell you why I know—but I do. There is something about this great crowd of people that is magical—they are more than just a crowd—they are something terribly special—almost enchanted! Look what happened to me within hours after I got to these people. Suddenly, I was free! Do I sound cold-blooded? I’m sorry, but it’s the way I feel. I did everything I knew to make our marriage work and I can’t feel any remorse now. There was a horrible misunderstanding between us which Tony made no effort to heal. Instead, he took delight in driving it deeper and deeper. I never knew why. He wasn’t just killed by one man. This whole multitude killed him, because he wasn’t right for it. But I think I am—I know I am—and I’m not afraid.”

He patted her hand. “You’re under a great strain.”

“No. I *was*. Now I’m perfectly satisfied just to be alive—and wait.”

“Well—we’ll say no more about it now.” Again he gave her hand a fatherly pat. “There’s the cemetery ahead.”

“Good. Can we stay until the grave is filled?”

“That’s not necessary, you know.”

“I want to be sure he’s buried. He’d get up if he could, and torment me more.”

“Please, my dear—you must get control of yourself.”

“I’m not hysterical.” But her voice was high. “I see quite clearly. Oh, I can’t stand this horrid veil! Why am I wearing it?” Impatiently she flung the long crepe back over her hat. The face she turned to Foster was dead white. “You see? Don’t I look quite calm?”

“Don’t fret yourself,” murmured Foster, “. . . the strain . . . I understand . . . you mustn’t be afraid.”

She laughed. “Afraid? I tell you I’m *not* afraid. Not of anything—not any more. It’s a funny feeling not to be afraid—something like being drunk would be, probably. I’ve been a snivelling little coward for so long——”

“What?”

“I had no idea how satisfying it would be not to have to cringe or whine or be terrified.” She stared at him with brows drawn questioningly. “I wonder if not giving a damn makes everybody feel this good?”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

HEADING for the drawing site on the prairie, the thousands streamed out of the town and from the encampment. Each wheel and hoof and boot stirred a puff of red dust until a pall hung in the air. The host of men, most of them farmers, a few accompanied by sunbonneted wives, converged on a natural amphitheatre.

On a rise at the far end of it stood a scaffold with a platform floor. It was draped with red-white-and-blue bunting. A squad of blue-uniformed soldiers lounged at the base. Steps led up to the floor, on which there were three tables for the counters and chairs for the U.S. commissioner and his aides. A large American flag dropped from a staff at a rear corner. A wooden octagonal barrel, fifteen feet long and mounted on a frame with a crank, was prominent on the platform. Under the commissioner's eye, clerks were dumping the one hundred and ninety-three thousand buff envelopes into an aperture in the barrel.

Throughout the area soft drink and food stands covered with cheesecloth and spangled bunting had been erected. In the hollow square formed by the counters of these stands a July symphony was being played: the soft roar of flies, the sizzle of ham, the clink of tin dipper against ice in the lemonade tubs, the thump of salt shaker against oil cloth, the snarls of reddened cooks echoing the mounting orders, the sharp scraping of the griddle. In front of tent-shacks where they had crusty sandwiches, watered coffee, and Biblical postcards for sale, ladies of the Methodist and Baptist churches beat a din on new tin pans and cackled their offerings. Roasted peanut and popcorn vendors with wicker baskets suspended from shoulder straps called raucously to the crowd.

And the throng multiplied, trampling the sun-baked earth to grass-littered dust, the shouts and jeers of the hopeful blending with the harsh cries of the refreshment hawkers.

Down the winding road which led from the cemetery back to town crawled the undertaker's carriage bearing Sawyer and Barney Foster. Where the road curved into the edge of the drawing area, Sam Jones began to protest that he would never be able to force a way against the incoming traffic.

"We're stuck all right," said Foster. "And if you don't mind, Sawyer, I'd like to go and take a short look around."

He lifted his hat and stepped down and disappeared into the crowd.

"Looks like they're about to begin," said Sam Jones. His heartiness made Sawyer wince. "Yup, there's S. B. Jackson—he's the U.S. Commissioner—holding up his hand for quiet—and beginnin' to get it.

'Bout seventy-five thousand here, wouldn't you say? 'S what the paper guessed 'twould be. Person don't have to be present for the drawin'. you know—notify 'em by mail. These is mostly folks which got here the last day or so, or else people that ain't got no place to go nohow till they win a farm. Some sight, ain't it?"

Her unresponsiveness unsettled him slightly. "Hope you don't mind me talkin' on so. I'm the *greatest* talker. Most folks don't seem to mind. Why, I even carry on a little conversation with the dead when I'm preparin' 'em. One-sided, o' course. It's friendlier somehow. Don't like too much silence myself. Lông as a man talks he's bound to be alive."

She closed her eyes against the darting cheer of his eyes.

"Speakin' of talkin', the folks don't want to hear all that spiel Jackson's shootin' to 'em right now. Just like a politician. Give one a crowd—— What now? Darned if he ain't beginning to read Pres'dent McKinley's whole dern proclamation. 'Sifever'body hadn't read it a'ready."

While the commissioner read from the document, Sam Jones bit off a chew and took off his silk hat to fan himself.

"Through at last," he sighed. "But what's he sayin' now, fer goodness sake? Oh pshaw, ever'body knows that too."

He spoke over his shoulder without looking around. Sawyer gazed at the multitude, every face turned up to the platform. Suddenly, she no longer felt that she was one with them. She knew nothing about any of them, but they had learned enough about her in the past twenty-four hours to set her apart as an outcast. The elation of freedom and confidence she had enjoyed a few minutes before withered, and she felt small and alone and unwanted. Why was she sitting here, she wondered. She felt an obscure urge to move on, though to move on where she didn't know . . .

"He's tellin' 'em why the fust ticket drawn'll be wuth so much. Fella that gits that ticket will be the richest man in the whole tootin' reservation. Like Jackson's sayin' and like ever'body knows, the person whose ticket comes out fust can choose the hun'erd-and-sixty which lays smack against the town site on the no'th, and the guv'ment has said this farm can be sub-divided as an addition to the town after the provin'-up period. That'll make his land worth fifty thousan' dollars at the least, folks say. Listen to 'em cheer. Ever' man out there is pantin' to draw that ticket."

The commissioner retired to one side. A hefty man with a beaming smile got up, elaborately took off his hat and coat, executed a heavy-footed crabwise dance to the long barrel and took up a scowling position by the crank. The crowd laughed good-naturedly.

"Look at that Ancil Newsome, won'tcha? Ancil's a local fella. Likes to show off in front of crowds. Ought to see him umpire a ball game.

Well, he's actually started turnin' the crank. Ancil's mixin' up two hun'erd thousand hopes and dreams in that there barrel, young lady."

Sawyer glanced at the slowly revolving barrel, then looked away.

"Ol' Ancil's really sweatin'. He's lookin' at the commissioner beggin' him to say he's turned 'er enough. Let 'im turn 'er, Jackson—he wanted to get up before the crowd.

"The crowd's gettin' restless, I guess you notice. Can't blame 'em. Never seen such a scorcher as to-day. Did you, young lady? Ancil's done. He's takin' his bow. Hee-hee-hee. A reguluh ca'd.

"Oh-oh. See that little boy steppin' up to the front, all dressed out in knickers and white shirtwaist? That's Harvey McCauley's little boy. Mostly Mrs. McCauley's, I reckon. Ain't but only ten years old but the derndest orator you ever seen. Gonna outshine Bryan one of these days. He makes W.C.T.U. orations. Demon rum and the gin mills and where is your boy to-night. He ain't gonna make a speech to-day, though. Leastwise, I hope not. He's gonna draw the envelopes. Yup, there he goes.

"Oh-oh. He can't reach the little slidin' door in the drum. They're gettin' a cheer for 'im to stand on. In goes his arm. Out it comes! And he's got the fust envelope. He gives it to the commissioner and the commissioner's openin'——"

"Oh, let's get on!" said Sawyer suddenly. She couldn't bear to sit helpless and be hammered by this man's stultiloquy. Why should he be allowed to babble on and on? Not to sit here; only to be going—anywhere! "The road's clear ahead. Go on."

"But, lady——"

On the platform the commissioner turned importantly to the counters. His voice boomed out.

"Drawing No. 1 Registration No. 181,409!" To the crowd he bel-lowed, "I take gre-e-at pleasure in announcing that the holder of the first ticket draw-a-a-wn, the winner of one hundred and sixty acres worth a mi-i-inimum of fifty thousand dollars——i-i-i-if he wants it——" he interpolated humorously, but the crowd was holding its breath and refused to expel any of it on laughter——

"I said please drive on."

"But——"

"Go on, I said!"

"Yes, ma'am."

Reluctantly, Jones clucked and slapped the reins. They had not gone five yards when he pulled the horse to a rearing halt, nearly toppling backward off the seat as he did so.

"Whoa there! Lady! Did you hear what he said? *Did you hear what Jackson said?*"

She had heard the commissioner's bellow, but not consciously the content of his words. Now like a magnified echo, the name roared in her ears.

"... An-n-n-thun-n-ny-ay-chuh-tyn-n-dal-l-l! *Is he here?*"

A silence had fallen on the crowd. Then a concerted groan went up as everyone realised the name called had not been his own.

"Lady, that's your husband he called for, ain't it? Anthony H. Tyndall? The man we just interred?"

Sawyer stared bewildered into his goggling eyes.

A murmur had begun in the crowd. Isolated shouts rose about it.

"Wasn't that the crook who was shot yesterday?"

"Yes—the trickster that got killed—his name was Tyndall."

"Anthony Tyndall—it was in the paper this morning."

"That crook's dead."

"His ticket's no good!"

"Throw it out!"

The tone of the crowd reflected every man's hope that next time his name might be called.

"Draw again!"

"Draw another ticket!"

"Why," said Sam Jones, "this is the gosh-derndest thing I ever heerd of. Drawin' a dead man's name. Old Jackson don't know what to do—he's talking it over with his staff. Say—who's that just jumped up on the platform? I never seen him before. He's holdin' up his hand for quiet. But he ain't gittin' it. No sir."

Even at that distance Sawyer recognised the tall figure of Allen Dunbar. He was shouting something but he could not be heard. Another figure appeared beside him, shoved him to one side. As the figure took off the wide-brimmed white hat and held it high in an appeal for order she saw his black-and-silver hair in the sun.

"That one's your Mr. Foster, young lady. He ain't gettin' no place with 'em neither. What good could he do? You can't give land or money to a dead man. He wouldn't be interested. Look out! Foster's grabbed a pistol out of that soldier's holster. He's firin' it in the air. He's givin' the soldier back his pistol and the soldier's sore about it. That was a pretty good stunt. He's got 'em laughing anyhow. What's he sayin'?"

Foster didn't bellow like the commissioner. His words rang out crisply and reached clearly to the carriage.

"Friends! Anybody could understand your feelings at this moment. And I'd be the last man to try to influence you against the way you feel. You're the people and as far as I'm concerned that makes you

the boss. This is a democracy. But you are intelligent, reasonable men and you like to have the full facts. I did not know the deceased——”

“He was a crook—a cheap crook!”

“It may be as you say,” Foster called back. “They say it takes a crook to know a crook, and brother you sound like you know what you’re talking about!”

It was a retort the crowd liked. They pounded one another’s backs, slapped their thighs, and guffawed at the expense of the heckler.

“I did not know the deceased,” continued Foster, “but after his death I happened to meet his widow. Yes, men, he was married and she’s not the kind of woman you might think. She’s lovely, honest, and fine. I’m a good enough judge of human character to know that. I discovered she was penniless and friendless and I took it on myself to see that her husband got a decent burial for her sake, no matter what he was. No,” and he held up his hand, “I don’t want any credit for that. Any Christian man of your present would have done the same.”

“Who are you?”

“The name, friend, is Barney Z. Foster. Z for Zadkiel and I can whip any man here who laughs at it.”

Chuckles erupted through the crowd in appreciation of his challenge.

“I’m a man who is heading for the new country, just like you. And you’re going to hear the name Barney Foster a good many times from now on. Because Barney Foster is just as determined as you to help build a fine, progressive, clean, and honest community out there. And that’s exactly why I’m asking for a few words now.

“Now listen, men, there’s a fair way and an unfair way to do things. We’re starting out with a clean slate in this lottery. We’re all looking for a new chance, working together. Do we want it said of us that our very first act was to defraud a penniless, bereaved widow of her rights? That would be a fine way to start, wouldn’t it? Yes, I’m talking about her rights. This widow of the man whose name was just drawn is legally entitled to inherit his property. I think the commissioner would tell us that.”

The commissioner, perplexed, looked to his seated aides.

“You *must* say yes,” breathed Sawyer. “You must. It’s mine. You know it is!”

A few of the aides scratched their heads; they all leaned forward in a huddle. They sat back, slowly and solemnly nodding. The commissioner judicially passed the nod on to Foster.

Sawyer let out a long breath. “You had to.”

“He’s tryin’ to give that air money to a crook’s woman!” A feminine voice shrilled it from under a sunbonnet. Other sunbonnets took up the cry.

"She's a thief, too."

"We ain't gonna have no bad woman takin' what's our'n."

Sawyer doubled her fists tightly. "What do you mean—yours? And stop calling me names," she muttered, "you old—hags!"

Foster spread his arms helplessly. The great majority of farmers, who were unaccompanied by wives, began shushing the irate women and their husbands begged them to be still.

"Gentlemen," said Foster, "let's not be rude to the ladies. They are good Christian women and they haven't stopped to think, that's all. Of course they would like to have their husbands draw the first ticket. I've got a ticket in there I'd like to see come out first. But if another ticket is drawn just one of us here—and it might be somebody not even present—would benefit at this widow's expense. All the rest of us would bear the shame of that act. Do we want that?"

The crowd was silent. Sawyer waited. Years seemed to pass at a crawl. Then a rumble of approval of Foster's appeal began to rise. Cries of "No, we don't want to rob no woman" were heard. Sawyer's lips curved in a small, hard smile.

"That's right. You men are mostly farmers who want a piece of fine land so you can make an honest living as an American farmer. There are thirteen thousand good farms less one left in that wheel. It's up to you to tell the world the kind of men who met here to-day. I know the fair-minded Christian majority of you will not stand by and permit a lone girl to be cheated of her rights."

"Where is the woman?"

"Is she here?"

"Let's have a look at her!"

The rising clamour to "see the woman" beat into the carriage.

She saw Foster turn and beckon with an overhead sweep of his hat.

"Well, can't you see him?" Sawyer shouted at the open-mouthed undertaker. "Drive over there!" Still, the undertaker sat as if hypnotised. Sawyer leaped to her feet. "You darned old fool," she cried. She pounded his back with her fists. "Don't you know what's happened? Drive me to him—hurry!"

Jones jumped up on the front seat. Holding the reins like a charioteer, he forced the carriage through a lane which men fell back to open. "Here she is, gentlemen!" he yelled. "I've got her right here!"

Having re-seated herself, Sawyer, despite the wild emotion in her breast, swiftly considered how she should conduct herself. She concluded that to look straight ahead with an expression of serene indifference would be best. She lifted her right hand and placed it casually between her breasts. No, she was a widow, in mourning. She thought to lower her opaque veil, but rejected that immediately. They must see her face,

lovely, sad, in deep sorrow. She let the corners of her mouth droop and attempted a pathetic glaze for eyes. But it was difficult for her to be sure how effectively she was doing it, her heart was beating so rapidly and there was such an elation in her . . .

As men sighted her there were whistles and catcalls of surprised approval. Two men jumped on the step on opposite sides for a close-up look into her face. "Damned if she's more than sixteen," shouted one across to the other, who yelled back, "Oh, she's twenty, I'd say—and a peach!" Other men pulled them down and leaped up in their place to look for themselves.

As the carriage drew up beside the platform, she had a glimpse of Allen Dunbar near the foot of the stairs. Before other men closed in front of him, there was no time for her to try to decide what was behind his incredulous half-smile.

Foster reached down for her hand and helped her on to the wooden steps, shouting, "Congratulations!"

As she came on the platform, she tried to smile, but her trembling lips would not obey. Foster cried, "Fellow pioneers, I give you Sawyer Tyndall, queen of the new country, sign and symbol of good fortune for all of us."

At that, the shouts rising from the meadow of uplifted faces, detonating in her ears, mounted to pandemonium.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THERE are times when a symbol is needed to make manifest a people's exultation, or its triumph, or whatever may be its common emotion at the moment. And a crowd so aroused is sensitive to any phenomenon which might be interpreted as an omen—a flight overhead of three pigeons, a cloud passing over the sun—and if the omen be good, joy will be unrestrained.

Barney Foster acted with the instinct of a practised manipulator of mass opinion when he hailed Sawyer as a "sign and symbol of good luck for all of us." The multitude, most of them coming out of a past burdened with failure and complicated by error, stood on the prairie in a faith that the new land would provide a fresh life, well worth the living. Suddenly, at the peak of their emotion, there appeared before them a figure draped in the black of the unhappy past, but whose face was as young and fair as the future.

The time and the place were perfect for it, and they made the most of it.

While riding back to the hotel, Sawyer occasionally lifted a languid hand in greeting to those who called out their congratulations. Barney Foster, seated beside her, every once in a while leaned far down to hide a burst of uncontrollable laughter. He shook his head unbelievably. "Oh, Sawyer, my girl!" he said. "Sawyer, Sawyer!" She favoured him with a smug, winsome smile. "I told you, didn't I," she said, unable to resist pointing out her clairvoyance, "that I wouldn't have to make hats or run a typewriter?" "God yes!" admitted Foster. "God yes, Sawyer, you did."

As they rode, Sawyer swiftly adjusted her frame of mind in order to enjoy fully her new circumstance. Impressed though she was by the fortune she had won, still that did not give her as much pleasure as did the demonstration of high esteem she heard on every hand. While waiting drearily at the lottery site, before the drawing, she had begun preparing herself for the role of a pariah. She had told herself that henceforth she would be considered an outcast by all decent people. The prospect, as she had begun to conceive it, had been painful though not altogether unpleasant; it permitted her to see herself, heavily veiled, moving everlastingly in uncomplaining grandeur through a shunning world. But hardly had the vision of backs coldly turned begun to take form than she was embraced by the multitude, and every face which looked into hers smiled and shouted pleasant words.

Sawyer's deepest fear, as long as she could remember, had been that people would think her not worthy of their company. Her deepest yearning, on the other hand, was to be accepted and admired. And here, suddenly, was a multitude shouting admiration. The joy it evoked in her might have been overwhelming had she not, so often, engaged in daydreams in which she was idolised. This setting was unlike any she had ever imagined, and that gave it a freshness pictorially, but the pleasure it gave her was precisely the same as she had often induced by daydreams in which she was adored by all. She dismissed easily the poignant picture of herself as a widow in mourning, as easily as if it were a dream now to be discarded for a better one that had occurred to her.

The people with whom she began to come into contact in the next few hours were astonished by the poise with which this exceedingly young woman accepted her elevation; they did not know, as Sawyer knew, that she was theoretically practised at responding to adulation. Thus, when the Young Men's Guitar and Mandolin Club of El Reno gathered in the hall outside that evening and sang and played to her, she pleased them by opening the door at last and thanking them. By next morning people had begun to call to congratulate her, and as word of the gracious reception they received got around, scores of men and women who were going to the new town also dropped by for a pleasant how-do-you-do. On the second night she was guest of honour at a banquet given by the El Reno Commerce Club to celebrate the conclusion of ten exceedingly profitable days for the town's merchants. The toastmaster delivered a flowery tribute to her, and presented her with a gold-inlaid mother-of-pearl fountain pen. She smiled as she accepted it—the smile of one who has many times received gifts of gold from heads of state and Oriental princes. Whenever she appeared on the streets she was asked for her autograph, and everybody suddenly seemed to be the owner of a Brownie Kodak with which he wanted—and was graciously permitted—to take her picture.

However, she was not so completely sure of herself as she appeared to be. The gnawing sense of inferiority which never quite left her had to be repressed thoroughly before she could enjoy her new role to the utmost. Frequently, her best daydreams had been shattered by an unwelcome voice crying, "This is Sawyer Bolton—illegitimate daughter of an adulteress—shun her!" When would that terrifying voice rend this best of all dreams? She had begun battling that unwanted, haunting fear as soon as she returned to the hotel. She went into Room 322 with eyes narrowed to combat a single unfavourable glance from the women there—she still remembered the shrill, female slander at the drawing—but the women, including the Bible-reading woman, were courteous and

deferential. She was further reassured when the hotel manager, flanked by the desk clerk and two porters, came to invite her to a suite.

As they went down the hall the manager mingled congratulations with apologies for having crowded her in with the other women in the first place. The clerk, who had combed his hair and straightened his tie and put a rosebud in his lapel, pranced on ahead. The porters brought up the rear, disputing over who should have the privilege of carrying her one bag.

From the sitting room, which had a bright-flowered carpet, and blue plush furniture precisely placed, Sawyer could see into an adjoining bedroom furnished in fumed oak. A chambermaid hastily putting finishing touches to the bed turned at Sawyer's entrance, curtsied awkwardly, and slipped out.

"This is nice," said Sawyer, her pronouncement altering the manager's expression from anxiety to delight. "How much is it?"

"You will not be permitted to pay," said the manager with a quick bow. "We are honoured to have you as our guest."

Sawyer turned to him with a smile. "Why are you?"

"We— What's that, please?"

"You said you are 'honoured' to have me—and I asked you why."

"Well—*because*! Because you've drawn the prize. Fifty thousand dollars, madam! All the newspapers! To have you as our guest——"

"But there was a newspaper yesterday, too. You saw that story?"

The manager waved his hands deprecatingly. "Yesterday!" he said scornfully. "There is no such thing as yesterday in this country, madam."

"No?"

The manager shook his head. "What you are to-day—that's all that matters. It's a new country. It begins every morning."

"I see." She wanted him to tell her again! "And so to-day, you are——"

"We are honoured."

The clerk had been fidgeting. "Is there anything," he pleaded, "just *anything* else we can do for you?"

"Well—I-I . . ."

There flashed in her mind a picture of Aladdin about to rub his lamp.

"Well—I *am* rather hungry," she said tentatively.

The clerk swung on one of the porters standing in the hall and fixed him with a forefinger. "You!" he said. "Tell the kitchen! Our best dinner! And nothing burned, or——"

The porter disappeared.

She had a lamp—and it worked.

She remembered she had promised to return the kindly Mrs. Thornton's clothes as soon as possible. Funny, she had married him in a borrowed dress and gone to his funeral in a borrowed dress . . .

She would try her lamp again.

"Do you know of a good dressmaker?"

"The Gebhart sisters!" cried the clerk. "They're wizards! Especially Miss Clara."

"They will come and see you at once," pronounced the manager. "If," he added, "you wish it."

"I should like it."

The genii bowed and withdrew.

As soon as their footsteps receded, Sawyer flung out her arms, arched her neck, and laughed aloud. She whirled and danced about the carpet, and then fell into the easy chair, her legs outstretched, and laughed again. A corner of the crepe veil fell from her hat and she blew it. She took off the hat and veil, regarded them with distaste, and frowned as she put them on the table beside her. She put her head against the back of the chair, and closed her eyes, whispering, "Sawyer, you lucky, lucky child." She sprawled thus, letting her tense muscles relax, until her dinner came.

When the Gebhart sisters appeared, they turned out to be two little spinsters, middle-aged, with low-pitched voices and small, strong fingers. At first they seemed alike, except that Miss Clara was attired in a green suit and her elder sister in grey. Before they left, though, it had been demonstrated that although Miss Ethel Gebhart was a good dressmaker, Miss Clara was truly a couturière, with the instincts of a Paquin.

They came eager for their assignment, bearing illustrations of styles of mourning. Sawyer studied the sketches carefully. She had made a daring decision while eating. Barney Foster knocked while she was trying to get courage to announce it.

"Tell me which of these you like best," she pleaded.

He took the sketches to a window and looked them over. Before he could speak, she said, "You want my opinion?"

"Sure."

"I don't like any of them. Why should I wear them?"

Foster glanced at her keenly.

"That's exactly what I told sister!" said Miss Clara unexpectedly. "Exactly!"

"Now Clara," admonished Miss Gebhart.

"I don't care what's traditional or customary. I have a *definite feeling*. And I always speak my mind. This is no ordinary occasion—far from it. I——"

"Do you feel it too?" asked Sawyer eagerly.

"Go ahead," invited Foster.

"Clara is so impulsive," murmured Miss Gebhart.

"Impulsive or not," said Miss Clara spiritedly, "if I had just been handed a fortune on a platter, and I were young and had exciting days unavoidably before me, I wouldn't go around in mourning for some man who—well, not for *any* man I wouldn't," she finished.

"Clara!" murmured Miss Gebhart.

"Oh, if Mrs. Tyndall were back in some little town in the East, where the outward niceties have to be observed because there's very little else to do anyway——"

"Clara doesn't like the East," exclaimed Miss Gebhart.

"I hate stuffiness. Who doesn't? I must say I didn't know quite what to look forward to in the person of Mrs. Tyndall, but I'm favourably impressed—very."

"Thank you," said Sawyer.

"You know she can't retire into seclusion. There is a great deal she *must* do, and to fly about doing it in weeds would be *mauvais ton*. Yes, under the circumstances I'm sure weeds would be much of a hindrance and out of place and if it were I, I shouldn't expect to be criticised for putting them aside."

"I agree," said Foster. His reason for agreeing, he knew well, was that he wanted Sawyer to put aside everything that would remind her of Anthony Tyndall.

"On the other hand," said Sawyer dolorously, "I don't want to appear to lack respect for the memory of my departed husband."

Foster's glance pierced her, his right eyebrow lifted quizzically.

She blushed.

Miss Clara said apologetically, "I've been thoughtless. Of course you're deep in grief. But my dear, we're so happy for you and all—it's difficult for us to realise that you——" She sighed resignedly. "We will do whatever you wish."

Sawyer avoided Foster's eyes. "Well, weeds are *so* hot, and——" she had to look at Foster—"they really *do* make me look awful, don't they?"

He nodded.

"I should much prefer to wear something cool," she said to Miss Clara. "Won't you suggest something?"

Miss Clara sprang to her feet. She clipped on a pair of pince-nez and walked up and down before Sawyer, her bright green eyes sizing up.

"Stand please," she commanded.

Sawyer stood up. A thoughtful finger at her pursed lips, Miss Clara circled her, frowning.

"With your figure you could wear any style," she said at last, "but the fashions just now happen to be exceptionally good for your type. Simple lines, no padding, emphasis on grace, good health and slenderness. Now let's consider what we're trying to do. We want to get away from black but a halfway measure—that is, ordinary dress—might be lamé, mightn't it? Certainly it wouldn't be taking full cognizance of our opportunities—and our limitations. Black to—what?"

"I'll tell you what I sort of thought," said Sawyer. "White."

"White!" repeated Miss Clara. "It's an inspiration!"

"In some countries," offered Miss Gebhart, "white is the mourning colour."

"I know," said Sawyer modestly. "That's why I thought it might be all right." Again she avoided Foster's eyes.

"Beautiful," said Miss Clara. "White! We'll put you in white! From head to foot. White skirt, white shirtwaist—perhaps the jacket ornamented with white stitching. That brings us to a second problem. Your appearance is a little too young to be in harmony with your situation. I mean, the widow who is a woman of wealth. You have a definite aura of inexperience . . ."

Inexperience? thought Sawyer. If only they knew . . .

". . . Your attire must help you—not too sophisticated, of course—we must keep you fresh—and yet— A little something with the hat, and I will show you a trick or two for your hair. White shoes—the heels should be higher than those you're wearing—you could stand even a trifle more height than you have, my dear, now that Gibson has made the taller girl the rage. And I think—no—yes!—a white feather boa. What would you say to a boa, Ethel?"

"Well . . ." said Miss Gebhart.

"We'll think about it. Later on, you may wear a ring with a white stone, and perhaps white bracelets. For the present, though, we will keep it simple. The boa is as far as I care to go, I think." She peered at Sawyer "There's just one thing that bothers me."

Sawyer had been trying to keep up with the little woman's circling by turning her head from side to side. Nothing like this had ever happened to her before; she liked it.

"What bothers you?"

"Your colouring. You're terribly pale. It robs us of contrast. You need more—more tone in your skin. I'm going to give you a white parasol and a white net veil, but don't use them constantly. Let a little of the sun get to you. Not too brown. Just the delicate brown, say—of a biscuit in the oven as it first begins to turn."

"And my hands?" Sawyer asked. "Should I let them burn also?"

"A little," said Miss Clara, "though not so much that it will look

as if you worked with your hands. And not if they start to freckle. Now then. I brought a whole book of Butterick's summer patterns—we will use them only as a starting point to give you an idea of what we have in mind——” She glanced triumphantly at her sister. “I just hoped something like this might develop.”

“To tell the truth,” admitted Miss Gebhart, “so did I.”

Miss Clara tilted her head and regarded Sawyer again. “Well, now for measurements.”

Sawyer and the Misses Gebhart retired to the bedroom for the measuring and a discussion of the hundred details of stitching, tucks and flounces, the bell skirt, the inverted mutton sleeve or the tight sleeve, the straight front, the long hip, the bias and the gore, linen, organdie, crepe de Chine, taffeta, pongee, Valenciennes lace. Foster, who had been amused by the female talk, heard their excited chatter rise and fall; by the time he had finished his cigar he began to wonder if they would ever be done in there.

After they had finally come out and the Gebhart sisters had hurried away, Sawyer swung around to Foster.

“I took you at your word when you said you'd advance me all the money I needed,” said Sawyer. “I ordered *three* complete costumes. Isn't that awful? But I got started and couldn't stop. Isn't Clara Gebhart superb? They're going to call in five or six other women who are clever with a needle and work all night and then some.”

Foster waved a fresh cigar airily from the armchair. “Shoot the works. You're a big shot. You'll have to live up to it.”

Thoughtfully, “I suppose I shall, shan't I?”

“How does it feel by now—being rich?”

Sawyer sat on the front edge of the sofa. While considering his question, she passed her fingers lightly over her forehead as if to erase lines of bewilderment.

By God, thought Foster, she's started to act. It's sinking in on her who Sawyer Tyndall is now and she's begun to play the part. He was sure that when she answered him, her voice would be pitched lower than natural. It was.

“Mostly,” she said, “it's like a dream—only *real*. Anyway, it makes me want to laugh.”

“Go ahead. You've got a nice laugh.”

Instantly, her dark eyes sought his. “Have I?”

There was a pathos in the inflection that stirred Foster. He recognised that she was starved for somebody to be nice to her. Plenty of people are going to be glad to, but, he vowed to himself, Barney Foster is going to be at the head of the line.

“Yes,” he said. “A beautiful laugh.”

She was silent a moment, looking down at the carpet. Then, from the edge of the sofa, she leaned far back, her mass of yellow hair cushioning her head against the frame top of the back. She gazed at the ceiling, then pushed the fingers of her right hand under the wave of hair at her temple, and closed her eyes. It was a simple theatrical gesture, but Foster's state of mind drove him to interpret her relaxed, outstretched posture as an attitude of potential surrender.

Taking advantage of her closed eyes, he stared at the long curve of her throat, and her breasts rising and falling about her small waist. His gaze roved down her curving thighs to her crossed ankles, which showed below her skirt, the toes of the oxfords pointed at him. His eyes retraced their course, deliberately undressing her, until she lay naked before him. His breath was caught full and painfully in his lungs.

He could not remember when his mind had dwelt so on the satisfaction he would take from a woman. Since the night of the Inaugural Ball . . . first watching her as she danced with Tony; then, when they stopped before him, his eyes swiftly appraising the signs of a passionate nature aroused and demanding gratification: the soft smile trembling at the corners, the troubled grey eyes, the hollowed cheeks, the breasts swelling against the restraining satin. He had known then there would come a time when he would possess her. Where or when they would come together he had had no idea, but there would be a time and a place he was confident—because he willed it . . . If he knew Tony, she had been taught every trick that delighted in bed; and if he was a judge of women, her passion had made her an eager pupil. She's been a woman a very few years, he mused: however, you don't judge a woman's age by her years, but by the depth and quality of her passion . . . by the maturity of her appetite and her capacity to please. Tony must have left her accomplished . . . Damn! how they would wallow when he added his proficiencies to hers . . . Damn! how they would.

Her lips were moving: she was murmuring something.

Take it easy—go slow, his shrewder side warned. This morning she was only a girl you wanted to sleep with more than any other you ever saw. She's that and much more than that now. She's fifty thousand bucks. It's too soon, much too soon. There's plenty of time. Fifty thousand hard, round dollars.

Aloud, he said, "What are you whispering?"

"Fifty thousand dollars."

His facial muscles twitched; then he chuckled. "I was thinking the same thing. It comes nicely off the tongue, doesn't it?"

She opened here eyes and looked at the ceiling. "Did you ever go for two days without food except coffee?"

"No."

"I was thinking—from now on, I can have a seven-course dinner three times a day consisting entirely of quail on toast and nightingale tongues."

"Don't you think such fare might pall eventually?"

He expected her to smile at his little joke. But she lifted her head and frowned: "I wonder."

She got to her feet and went to the open window at the front of the room and pulled back the limp lace curtain. She looked down into the crowded street three storeys below.

"Everybody down there is happy because of one thought in his mind: 'I'll have a new chance out here.' I heard it on the train—it's what everybody is saying. It was why I wanted to come—*had* to come. The tremendous new chance that was handed to me to-day is bigger and brighter than anyone else is likely to get. I couldn't ask for more." She frowned, puzzled. "I knew there was *something* for me here—I didn't know it would be money. But the new chance they're expecting—do they expect money—just that? What do they mean by it? What do they plan to do with their new chance when they get it?"

Foster went over and stood beside her. "Must a girl as pretty as you be a philosopher?"

"I'm not being a philosopher. At least, I'm not reaching any profound conclusions. I don't know about them, but I've a suspicion that this 'new chance' I've been given ought to mean more than quail on toast. But, you know, just that, plus doing nothing I don't wish to do, and doing anything I care to that will make me happy, without having to consider anybody else or take orders from anyone—that's all I can think of that I want from it. Do they want something else—something else that I should want too, I mean?"

Foster looked down at the crowd.

"Well, one thing about it, they're on a binge—and you're on a binge. Nobody's in an exactly normal state just now. You've got the wherewithal to keep up your binge. They haven't. You want my idea of it? They're all excited now because they think their lives are going to be entirely different from what they have been. They won't be—not in a little while. Because they can't shake off all that's grown in them over the years. Who are they? Small towners and farmers, most of 'em, stuffed with all the prejudices, beliefs, morals, pettiness, and common-place respectability that you'll find anywhere else. They're going to find out before long that they're going to have to work to keep alive, just as they always did. Every farmer is going to have to walk behind a plough, same as always, and his crops are going to be about the same. Most of those fellows heading for the town have an idea about

being their own boss, owing their own business. A town isn't run that way. Most of 'em will wind up working on wages for the other man, same as always. And when they've found that out and the blush of adventure wears off, they're going to settle down to conventional lives and insist that their neighbours conform to their grubby rules. It's a part of self-preservation, I guess, that conformity, and self-preservation isn't going to be easy out yonder, in spite of the railroads calling it a land of milk and honey."

"Don't," said Sawyer. "You make it all sound so—ordinary."

"I'll give 'em a year of it before they settle down. No longer than that. I know 'em. I have to."

"You're going to be in the government, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Foster casually. "I suppose Tony mentioned something or other about it?"

"Oh yes. He said he was going to be associated with you in politics. That was what he was looking forward to, he said, but——"

"Some people," said Foster, "think politics is a more or less crooked game."

"I suppose so. I don't know anything about politics. But Tony had a great respect for *your* honesty—he looked up to you. What are you going to be in the government, Mr. Foster?"

"If you'll make it Barney, I'll tell you."

She laughed. "All right, Barney."

"I'm going to be their mayor."

"How wonderful! Is the government appointing you?"

"No, they're going to elect me. This is a democracy. You see," he went on, "good government is a kind of hobby of mine, and this is *my* 'chance'—my chance to put my theories into operation. But despite what I do, there probably will be vicious elements against me and you may hear some bad, false things about me before it's over. I'll have to trust you not to believe them."

"Of course I wouldn't! I should have guessed you're a statesman: you're so friendly and interested in helping others, and so commanding, and——"

"And you're such a flatterer."

"Isn't this grand? We're both going to be very important people in our new town—and I'm going to have the mayor for my very first friend."

He glanced down at her, standing at his side. Her upturned face lighted by joy excited him. He was afraid he was making a mistake, but he could not resist putting an arm around her waist, making it as casual and friendly a gesture as he could. To his relief, she did

not draw away. "Yes, Sawyer," he said, "we're going to be two very important people—and very good friends."

She patted his lapel, and turned away to the centre of the room, saying earnestly, "Everybody must have at least one friend he can trust." She faced him. "Mustn't one?"

"I want to be that friend," said Barney seriously.

She gazed into his eyes, purposely delaying her answer for a moment. "You will be," she said at last. She saw his chest lift in a deep breath and a thrill of feminine triumph went through her: she affected profoundly this mature, experienced man who undoubtedly had seen many beautiful women to judge by. He was about to say something. She anticipated him: "Oh, when will we go to the new town? I'm growing impatient already!"

"Well," he said, and, as if acknowledging the limit she had silently placed on their friendship for the time being, he picked up his hat. "The townsite won't be opened for a week. Takes only two or three days to ride out there. It'll be more comfortable waiting here in civilised surroundings. I'm going to buy a horse and buggy to-morrow, and I figured on leaving day after to-morrow. Like to go with me?"

"Why," she said, "I hadn't thought of going any other way. I mean, I'd be glad to."

"We'll ride along with some caravan or other—to safeguard your reputation."

She tossed her head. "Don't worry about my reputation. I'm not afraid of that—or anything else."

"Well—think of mine, anyway. As the coming mayor, I have to be careful." They both laughed. "I'll see you in a little while," he said, and went out.

Sawyer turned back to the window and looked once more at the pedestrians crowding the street below.

Queen of the new country, Barney had called her . . .

She stepped back from the window a little, to make sure of not being seen, and extended her arms to the crowd.

"My people!" she said in her best regal tone, "I greet you one and all."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SITTING on the edge of her canvas cot, a lighted lantern on her upended new suitcase, Sawyer wrote in a tablet she held on her knee. Covered wagons drawn up some distance away were ghostly in the prairie starlight. Yards off, Barney Foster snored on a quilt laid in the grass between the shafts of his box buggy. Sawyer was answering letters which she selected from a stack on the cot beside her. She had brought them along when she left El Reno that morning, and had read many of them during the long day's ride across the prairie.

The letters nearly all fell into two classes. Either they asked for money or proposed marriage. Those which begged—sometimes demanded—money had at first shocked her, they disclosed such poverty and misfortune, and she had resolved to answer all of them. But Foster had taught her to detect the shrewd calculation in many of them. Still she searched for those that sounded a note of real distress and answered them as best she could. Foster had warned her to beware of letters suggesting investments to double and treble her fortune. Such letters she discarded at the first paragraph.

She read all the way through the proposals of marriage, with an interest in their flattery which she depreciated by a smile of amusement. As she finished each one, she dropped it to a growing pile on the ground. She wished she had someone—Martha—to see how many there were. How Martha would have laughed with her over some of them. This embossed note from a count, for example—imagine Martha, a count! Touring America, he wrote, he had read of her sudden wealth in the *Denver Post*. He cared not one whit for her money, not he—he came of a noble landed family. He had fallen in love with the zinc-etched portrait of her which had appeared in the paper (drawn from imagination, it happened, by an artist in the office). How chagrined the count would have been, she thought, to see his perfumed note fall on top of a pencilled scrawl which began: "Dear Sweetie—Yor million bucks sounds good to me. Let's me and you get hitcht. I'm not only but forty-two years old and wimmun say I'm good-looking . . ."

She tapped the pen against her teeth and vaguely wished to write to Martha and tell her, oh very subtly, that despite Martha's horror of her marriage, things had turned out very well after all. The bitter memory of the scene in the McCraes' drawing room decided her against it. The McCraes were part of the escaped past; like all else that had happened previous to three days ago, they were to be forgotten as

completely as possible. Allen would tell Martha what had happened in one of his letters. What would he say?

Well, she reflected, he'd been most cordial—even impressed?—when he came to call at her suite, accompanied by his father, who boomed, to no apparent point, "Great work, Mrs. Tyndall! You see how it goes when you escape the clutches of Wall Street?" Allen, she was sure, was surprised to see her in a smart white linen skirt and silk blouse; his very fleeting change of expression robbed her for a moment of the supreme self-confidence she was enjoying, but he at once held out his hand and took hers strongly and said, "I can't tell you how happy I am." And he *did* look happy for her; he appeared to really mean it.

She was quick to say something gracious in reply: "I've wanted to thank you for going up on the platform and trying to help get the land for me."

"I wasn't very efficient," said Allen. "Mr. Foster knew how to handle the situation better."

"Oh, he's a grand man, isn't he?" said Sawyer.

"Why, yes, absolutely!" said Allen.

She probably should have added something about how nice she thought *he* was too, but, darn him, he seemed so self-sufficient and his manners were always so impeccably correct that to compliment him would surely sound like girlish gushing. It was funny how she felt like a completely grown-up woman when she was talking with Barney Foster, but with Allen, though he was much younger, she often felt like a child who might knock over her bowl of mush at any minute . . .

Should she write her father? wondered Sawyer. She rejected the idea instantly; how could it ever have even occurred to her. He probably would read about her in the papers, anyway. She wished she could see him, unobserved, as he tore the newspaper to shreds and called her and her mother names. Oh, there's no point in such petty thoughts—he's just another bad dream to be forgotten now.

Sawyer started to answer another letter, but her hand had become cramped. She screwed the top on the pen and put it and the tablet in her purse. She stood up; her muscles were stiff from the day-long ride. Her skirt dragging the grass, she carried the "love" letters to the nearest cookfire. The proposals flamed and died on the glowing buffalo chips—the common fuel on the virtually treeless prairie.

Returning to her cot, she blew out the lantern. In the darkness she took off her white shoes and stockings and wriggled her toes. She wished she could remove her corset, but she would be sure to wake up after daylight. She unbuttoned her dress and managed to loosen the corset at least, and she reached up and let down her hair.

Lying supine, she looked up at the stars sprinkling down everywhere to the horizon. She picked out the Big Dipper and Little Dipper and followed the brief span of a shooting star down the sky.

And then her thoughts went to Tony and in her mind's eye she saw the darkened grave. To-night the heap of red clay lay some thirty miles to the northeast; to-morrow would take her farther from it; and the next day still farther. She must put all memory of him out of her mind.

It was a dream-like purgatory, this night. What would it be like, a week, a year, from to-night?

She couldn't say. She could plan no future in a town that did not exist, in a house that was not, on land she had never seen. She was too tired to think to-night. She closed her eyes.

A cool south breeze sprang up, like a gentle miracle. It fell off, then came on again, and fanned her damp body steadily. Drowsily, she pulled a thin blanket to her throat.

Tony whispered: "*Do I look like the kind of a guy who would let his wife end up in the poorhouse?*"

Oh Tony, no. A part of you I'll keep with me, a dear, aching part I'll keep forever. Tony, Tony . . .

She was up and folding her cot when Foster looked over from a group around a cookfire and called, "Breakfast's almost ready." She waved good morning. Rolling her blanket, she awkwardly tied it with a cord and put it beside her suitcase and the lantern.

They were camped near a creek. Taking a towel and bar of soap from her suitcase, she walked over to it and descended the steep clay bank by holding to the projecting roots of a cottonwood. The creek had almost dried, but there were pools in which minnows swam. She shooed them away, and washed her face and hands. She had forgotten her hand mirror. She used the pool for a looking-glass while she did up her hair. Returning to the cot, she pinned on her hat, gathered up her things, and lugged them to the shining buggy.

Children in different stages of dress played about the wagons. Some of the men were hitching; at other wagons families were just wakening with yawns and stretchings.

Foster, his wind-burned face pink as the dawn, brought bacon and eggs, and coffee in white mugs. They put the tin plates on the buggy floor and ate standing in the grass.

"Sleep well?"

"Never so sound," said Sawyer through a mouthful of bacon. "I feel wonderful."

"Hear that coyote during the night?"

"No! I'd have been terrified."

"What do you say we strike out right away and get in some travelling while the morning's cool? I'm pretty tired of dragging along in the dust of these wagons, aren't you?"

"Oh yes."

"We can move fast and have our noon meal with another bunch. We already know these people."

He hitched while she pulled on her gloves and raised her white parasol.

A pigtailed girl with a Brownie Kodak ran over and shyly asked if she might have a picture. "I'm afraid there's not enough light," said Sawyer, but she lifted her veil and smiled down from the buggy seat while the shutter clicked. Some distance away, a woman washing dishes near a wagon suddenly called the child in an angry voice, and the child hastily left Sawyer. Eyes narrowed, Sawyer peered at the woman's back. She had recognised the shrill quality of the tone: it was like that of the hateful woman who had cried, "He's trying to give what's our'n to a crook's woman." Sawyer's lips tightened, but she shrugged off her annoyance. Why torment herself by giving thought to a tacky shrew?

As they drove out of the camp Foster shouted friendly farewells to the people, who were still trying to get organised to go on. The roan mare trotted briskly in the morning air.

"Here comes Sol again," said Foster. "Did you ever see such a sun as this country has?"

Sawyer dropped her parasol horizontally to shield her tender face. "This must be a special sun out here," she laughed. "It can't be the same one that shines everywhere else."

The rays caught the red wheels of the buggy and made the spokes twinkle as they spun across the rolling short grass. There was no road. Foster generally let the mare have her head; occasionally, he took out a small compass to make sure they were still headed in a south-westerly direction.

There was little need for navigation, however. Somewhere on the landscape were always farm wagons, or freighters, or a hack, all headed in the same direction. Most of the farm wagons carried families who had won a hundred-and-sixty. Lashed to the sides of these wagons were washtubs, cane-bottomed chairs, a water keg, a mouldboard plough, a kitchen range, and often trailing behind was a haltered cow or mule. Occasionally, their buggy spun past a prairie schooner, on its sides a banner reading, "Thompson's Mammoth Dry Goods Store, Biggest and Best, Trade at Thompson's," or perhaps "The Little Giant Drugstore on Its Way—Everything in the Drug Line—Bargain Sale of Dr. Little's Wonder Stomach Cure at Grand Opening—Don't Miss It."

Whenever they overtook such a freighter, Foster drew alongside and called to the occupants, "Greetings, neighbours. Name's Barney Foster. Barney Foster! Good luck to you."

They passed forty head of milk cows herded from horseback by a man and woman and their boy.

"Going to give the town a dairy?" called Foster.

"That's the idea, Mister," replied the man.

"Glad of it. Barney Foster's my name. If I can help you, let me know."

They overtook two squat wagons with broad wheels. In the first a shiny Winton roadster was lashed and blocked, a tarpaulin covering the engine against an exceedingly slender chance of a rain. In the Winton's seat, shaded by its buggy-top, sat two dignified-looking gentlemen in striped trousers and black morning coats. The wagon ahead of it, drawn by three teams in tandem, carried a huge black safe, atop which sat two men with rifles, who eyed them speculatively as they approached.

"Bankers!" said Foster. "I can smell 'em farther than I can see 'em." But as they passed the two gentlemen he called out his usual greeting and his name, and the bankers conservatively tipped their black bowlers in return.

"Oh Barney!" exclaimed Sawyer. "Doesn't this long ride across an empty land give you the strangest feeling?"

"In what way, Sawyer?"

"Well, it's a voyage, really—a strange voyage. I think of ourselves as part of a great fleet making—well, an almost mysterious ocean crossing. You can see them everywhere around us, some ships light and fast, like ours, others ponderous, like great cargo vessels. And this is part of the mysteriousness of our fleet; hardly anybody in one ship knows and has ever spoken to the people sailing the others—but we all know we have the same goal!"

"Do we have?" said Foster.

"Why, yes!" said Sawyer. "And this prairie—it rises and falls like the sea, and the jackrabbits running about, and that snake we saw—they could be marine animals—and those scissortails and meadow larks darting about—flying fish!—and the hawks are seagulls. And, strangest of all, it's such a long way across this sea to where we're going! Oh, I can't explain it—how it makes me feel—but it's such an important part of it all—this voyage—because it's taking us so very far from where we were—and it has to be a long voyage—so we can be sure all the sorrows are utterly left behind."

Foster chuckled sympathetically. "You're a beautiful woman when you're excited."

She tilted her head provocatively. "Is that the only time?"

"By no means," he assured her. "I—" He glanced at her mischievous eyes, daring him to flatter her further. "Look," he said, "here come some Indians."

The Indians approached from the south, a family of them, their flat-topped surrey drawn at a jogging trot by a pair of calico ponies.

Sitting astride the off-pony's back, her fringed leggings gripping its sides, rode a blanketed squaw. A papoose joggled on her back. An obese Indian, evidently the father, wearing black trousers and hat and a yellow shirt down which hung his two braids, sat like a coppery Buddha with folded arms on the front seat. The reins were held by one of two squirming boys beside him. The back seat was alive with children attired in reds and yellows and blues.

The boys and girls yelled gaily at them in mission English as they passed. Sawyer, gazing at them wonderingly, smiled at her first moment of fright, the whole family were so pleasantly colourful and the children laughed so easily. As they went by, the Indian father lifted in a friendly gesture a palm calloused by the plough handle.

After a while, Sawyer noticed a pillar of black smoke hanging in the sky ahead to their right. "A prairie fire, do you suppose?"

"I don't think so," said Foster. "A grass fire's smoke would be spread out."

They soon discovered what it was: the smoke of a locomotive coupled to a work train standing near the end of a railroad line under construction—an extension to the new town.

Gangs were blasting their way through a cut, the dirt being hauled farther back where other gangs were filling a depression, and behind them, labourers were laying ballast and ties and rails. A score of Indians, fascinated by the "fire horse," sprawled along the right of way.

They drew up not far from a sweating gang and Foster shouted, "Barney Foster's the name, men. When do you think you'll reach the new town?"

"Maybe in September, the way we're going," said the foreman.

"Good luck to you!"

The day had become oppressively hot. Sawyer suggested they find a shady place to stop and rest. Foster agreed, but the treeless country through which they were passing had become peculiarly hilly, with jagged outcroppings of crumbly white rock. No creek was in sight. They did strike a faint winding road, used by the military between El Reno and the Kiowa-Comanche country.

They passed four freighters loaded with lumber, and, a little later, a broken-down wagon from which had spilled sacks of flour and feed. Then, far down the road, Sawyer observed what she at first mistook for another wagon train of settlers. As they drew near enough to see

more clearly through the dust it raised, she was astonished to discover a string of circus wagons. Their sun-checked paint had peeled in places but their hues still were gaudy and the horses drawing them had harness studded with red and blue glass ornaments.

The mare shied past an old lion panting in a small cage wagon; a couple of bears roved in another, and there were chattering monkeys in a third. Perched high beside the driver of one yellow-and-green wagon a swarthy man mournfully played an accordion. At intervals in the procession were hacks and buggies carrying people who they presumed were the performers. To their usual greetings the circus people returned indifferent stares.

However, at the head of the procession a pinch-faced man in a cream-coloured victoria stood up, doffed his tall beaver and bowed low as they passed. The sun reflected briefly on the planes of his angular bald cranium before he hastily clapped on his beaver again. Slouched beside him was a scowling woman in a flowered-silk kimono, a purple scarf around her head, a cigarette hanging from her lips. The victoria was driven by a liveried Neco. A dwarf sat cross-legged beside the Negro, but facing the rear; he held a large striped parasol over the woman.

"A circus parade is one thing I hadn't imagined I'd see to-day," said Sawyer.

"And why not?" said Foster. "Aren't you enjoying it all as much as a circus?"

She laughed. "No circus was ever half so much fun!"

The road had narrowed on a fault scarp rounding a white rocky hill. Foster started to pull the mare to a walk. Sawyer was jostled as the left rear wheel bounced on a rock, she felt the buggy skidding, and then, as she held on frantically and the mare pawed futilely, the buggy slipped over the scarp and rolled down in a cloud of white dust. Sawyer cried out once as the earth revolved about her.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SHE kept her eyes closed while her mind attempted to arrange a series of unrelated impressions into a pattern that would tell her where she was. She was being rocked, the jerking abrupt and accompanied by rattlings and creakings. There was a grinding as of iron against stone. And there were voices. Queer voices: they quavered the way she and Jack at play used to make their voices vibrate by jiggling the skin of their throats between thumb and forefinger.

The content of the conversation was of no interest. Only the peculiar quality of the joggled voices fascinated her.

"... but this won't be a one-night stand. There'll be business to keep you there a long, long time." Why—that was Barney Foster's voice, surely; but it was shaken so. "In the tanks you played you were never sure your pay-off would stick. You back the right man in this town, you'll be on the inside..."

"How do I know who'll win out, though? If I guess wrong..." A high whiny voice—a man's.

"I have no connection with it myself, but I happen to know." Foster's again. "If you don't want to get in bad..."

"How come you're so thoughtful of us?" That voice was husky, but Sawyer was sure it was a woman's.

"Because it was mighty nice of you to pick us up. I want to repay you. You can do as you please, but don't say you weren't warned."

"I've got nothing to be afraid of." The whiny voice again. "I'm legitimate."

"You've got enough dips, shells, and clip merchants running the store in this outfit to stock a pen. If you're smart——"

"You smell of the tan, though you don't look it." The throaty woman. "I somehow cotton to your talk!"

Foster's genial laugh—it was reassuring—the woman's throaty chuckle.

Sawyer decided to open her eyes.

She looked into a horrible face, which drew away from her, grinning and uttering gibberish. The dwarf who had been holding the sunshade in the cream victoria! It held a wet cloth now, which apparently it had been about to lay on her forehead.

The faces of Foster and a man and woman appeared over her. The bald-headed man and the woman in kimono in the victoria. Their cheeks were rippling from the bumping and jolting.

"She's come to," said the bald man.

Foster knelt beside her. "You're all right?"

She was in a closed wooden wagon. The interior was painted red. Spangled dresses swayed from hooks on the wall opposite. A brass gasoline lamp swung in the ceiling. There were two square window openings. Through one a shaft of dust-laden sunlight lifted and fell. She lay—on a wooden bunk.

"The circus we passed?" Her voice also was shaky.

"They picked us up."

"Give me that cold rag," the woman said to the dwarf.

The cloth was soothing to her brow. The woman leaned over her, smiling. Lips red with rouge, eyelashes lamp-black but hair light brown. The kimono sagged open as she bent over and heavy breasts trembled.

"Just you take it easy, miss," said the woman.

"What happened?"

"We skidded over a bank," said Foster, "and your head hit a rock."

"You've been out nearly an hour," said the woman.

"Were you hurt?"

"No," said Foster. "The only other damage was a smashed wheel and broken shafts. Mr. Grossett says his blacksmith will fix that when we catch up with his baggage train this evening. And the mare's all right. Mr. Grossett here is the owner and this is Miss Trevaine."

"Cecilia Trevaine," said the woman with the fondling inflection of an actress pronouncing her own name. She poured water from a jug and offered the tin cup to Sawyer. "I'm a singer," she said. "The Sulphur Nightingale, I'm billed."

"Say!" said Foster, as Sawyer thirstily drank the tepid water. "You look dandy. You're going to be all right." Sawyer nodded. "Well," he said, "Mr. Grossett and I'll go up to the carriage then and leave you two ladies alone."

Grossett stuck his head out the window and bawled up to the driver to stop the train. "Let Oof come along, will you, and hold the sunshade?" asked Grossett. "We'll perish otherwise."

Cecilia motioned to the dwarf. He waddled on bow legs after the two men and hopped to the ground. Cecilia closed the door.

"Your papa's an interesting gentleman."

"Mr. Foster? He's not my father."

"No? I figured he was. Papa and daughter, I guessed to myself."

Cecilia sat on the trunk, leaned back against the wall and clasped a lifted knee. Then she thought better of it and dropped the knee and sat up properly, hands cupped in her lap.

"I don't believe I heard your name, miss."

"Mrs. Tyndall. Sawyer Tyndall."

"Pleased to meet you, I'm sure," said Cecilia with a courteous nod.

Then, "Wait a minute! Sawyer Tyndall, you said? You're not—Don't tell me you're the doll that copped the prize?"

"Yes," said Sawyer, confident of an awed reaction.

"Well, I'll be a reamed-out Angelina!" Cecilia threw back her head and laughed. "Can you imagine? We've all been talking about that. Biggest joke of the twentieth century. God, fifty thousand!"

"You think it's a joke," said Sawyer flatly.

"Fifty thousand's no joke, kiddo—never was. Oh my God, here I thought you was a nice Nellie herring I had to put on dog for. What a shakedown! Tell me, was the drawing fixed? How—No, you don't have to tell me. I'm sorry your geezer tried to flap a hot jay, but that's the way it goes. You're just as well off without him. I lived with a con man once, in Detroit. They're undependable, those sucker yentzers. Shifty punks. I hope you wasn't crazy about him. So it don't hurt, I mean."

"If you mean my husband," said Sawyer, "we were very fond of each other."

"All right," shrugged Cecilia. "He was a good guy—different from my rat. It's tough. But a dame like you and they hand you fifty thousand bucks."

"What do you mean, Miss Trevaine, a dame like me?"

"Say, one of the musicians—Al Walters, the cornet player—he claimed you used to be in a house in Pittsburgh. Said he knew you. We never know whether to believe Al, though. Was you hustling? Before, I mean?"

Sawyer regarded the woman through speculatively narrowed eyes. "You know, Miss Trevaine, now that you've mentioned my husband—you remind me of him very much."

"I do? You mean I look like him?"

"You talk like him."

"Well, thanks."

"My husband spoke of hustling women frequently," said Sawyer with easy cordiality. "As a matter of fact, he found pleasure in pointing them out on the street and making points of comparison between them and me. Like you, he professed to be unable to tell any difference between them and me. His idea of conversation was a constant delight—he liked to see how insulting he could be."

"How nice—Wait a minute!" said Cecilia. "How was that again?"

"It's almost like old times," said Sawyer pleasantly, "to have things like you're saying said to me. You've awakened a cosy nostalgia."

"What kind of high-falutin' gab is that?" demanded Cecilia. "I didn't suspicion you was a dame that reeled it off like that."

"Oh, but I am," smiled Sawyer.

"Well! All right!" said Cecilia. She lifted her right foot, pulled off a feathered mule, and banged it into a corner. "I don't see how I could know you'd be so snooty. Especially when you wasn't doing nothing but riding alone across the country," she said sarcastically, "with a man who don't care where he puts his hands five minutes after he meets somebody."

"Doesn't he really?" said Sawyer with an expression of polite surprise. "Mr. Foster has acted the perfect gentleman with me."

"Oh yes? Well, you'll just have to understand," said Cecilia, "it's not every day I get to meet a lady."

"I know," murmured Sawyer. She got to her feet, disregarding her dizziness, and went to the window.

Cecilia glowered at her back. "I don't get it," she muttered. After a moment, her face lighted. "Wait a minute. Maybe I do! Sure!" She slipped off the other mule and tossed it to the corner. "One thing none of us could understand was how the moll managed to be the biggety-muck at that businessmen's feed in El Reno and get all the hurrahs she got, seeing she was just the sweetie of a peewee chiz artist. But I can see it now—easy."

Sawyer turned, supporting herself with one hand on the window ledge. "You see what, Miss Trevaine?" she inquired.

"You *played* it that way. That's how you put it across! You got a *style* you've worked out." She laughed and nodded approvingly. "There you was, a dame with fifty thousand bucks in her hand, so you decided to play the lady for all hell and put it across. Sure, that's it, ain't it?"

"Sure," said Sawyer agreeably, "that's it."

Cecilia chuckled. "You almost had me sore for a minute—laying it on like that. But Judas Priest, you don't have to with me. You don't think I'd give you away, do you? What kind of a stinker do you think I am?"

"It hadn't occurred to me that you were any particular kind," said Sawyer.

Cecilia frowned. "Now look, hon," she said, kneading the toes of her left foot in her hand, "play it the way you think it ought to go, but honest now, don't let it swell you up—when you're not stewing it for the gillipins."

The wagon bounced over shale and Sawyer put a hand to her jolted, throbbing head.

Cecilia quickly got up from the trunk and came to her. "Here, you just lay down and take it easy," She led Sawyer toward the bunk. "You ought not to be on your feet. And I'll go up with Angus and your friend—your *gentleman* friend," she laughed, "so you can rest alone. Guess I'd better pretty up first."

So saying, she took her hand from Sawyer's arm and opened her kimono and let it slip down behind her. Sawyer had had no idea the woman was wearing nothing underneath. Caught unaware, she tried to look away; there was nowhere her eyes could go without glimpsing the jolted white body, sinuous as Cecilia shook her arms free and stirred her thighs away from the kimono; the voluptuous figure seemed to expand until the whole jarred interior of the wagon was filled with tremulous nakedness.

Sawyer sank to the edge of the bunk. She saw a red-and-purple butterfly tattooed on the woman's left leg above the knee. Lowering her eyes, she busied herself with brushing dust from her skirt.

Cecilia turned and stooped to pick up the kimono to hang it on a hook. Sawyer could tell by the direction of her feet that she was faced away. She could not resist raising her eyes briefly: she had never before seen another woman nude. She stared at a second tattoo—a whip extending across the broad rippling buttocks, on the left side the short red handle clenched by a hand, the right buttock scourged by three purple knotted thongs which seemingly were half-buried in writhing flesh.

Cecilia laughed shakily over her shoulder. "You like my whip?" Sawyer looked away quickly. "A fella I knew once thought it up. It's different, anyway," she said smugly when Sawyer did not comment as she expected. "Don't you think?" She turned, smiling. "I said, don't you?"

Sawyer marshalled her senses. "Oh yes. And not only different," she said lightly. "It's a work of art. It should be in a museum."

Cecilia laughed. "Well, it's had a lot of compliments."

"I can imagine." *Don't let her defeat you now*, she told herself grimly. "There's nothing like a tattoo to set off a woman's beauty, is there?"

"Well, it's kind of nice," said Cecilia, pulling on a pair of drawers, "knowing you've got it and it's a part of you and won't ever come off. Have you got a tattoo on you anywhere?"

"No," said Sawyer, "that's an oversight I should remedy at once. Obviously, no woman should be without such an artistic mark of distinction. Could you," she implored, "suggest a design that would go well with my type of beauty?"

Cecilia eyed her suspiciously. "Well . . ." Before answering, she laced on a corset, shook down a frilly petticoat and reached for her net stockings, all the while balancing herself like a sailor. She glanced at Sawyer again, then said, "Well, if you have one, it ought to be something good. I'll tell you the kind you *don't* want to have. It was a girl in a carnival I was with one time—a cheesy outfit that was—she called herself a Russian or Hungarian or something—she was a

glass blower—well, what she had was, she had a kind of necklace of flowers, red and purple, round each breast, with a bee kind of hovering over one nipple and a humming bird sipping at the other. But I'm telling you, don't never let no jab artist do nothing like that around your breasts. Suppose you had a low dress sometime, you wouldn't want it showing. Besides, cancer."

"Thanks for the warning," said Sawyer, "I'll be sure not to have that one."

"I'll tell you the damndest thing I ever saw," said Cecilia, buttoning her fluted shirtwaist. "This girl I happened to know, she had a freight train." Bending her knees outward, Cecilia touched a forefinger to her stomach. "The caboose was right here and the cars went on down here out of sight, then—" she turned around and reached back—"the cars came out here until up in the small of her back here was the engine. Right through the tunnel. The damndest thing you ever seen."

Sawyer blanched. "How fascinating."

"Yes, but you wouldn't want nothing like that neither. Not an old freight train."

Swallowing, Sawyer said, "But if it were a fine train, say, the Empire State Express, with a diner and sleepers and a parlour car, that might lend a tasteful effect in harmony with my personality, don't you think?"

Cecilia, pausing in the hooking of her skirt, set her lips firmly and studied Sawyer's innocent expression. "You know," she said finally, "I'd like it better if you'd talk English or either didn't rattle it off so fast. I don't exactly keep up and you've got a way of saying things that I'm not just sure how you mean for me to take it. For instance, you're not being sarcastic, by any chance?"

"I?"

"Well . . ." Cecilia reached into her trunk tray for a bracelet chain from which dangled imitation gold hearts, clover leaves, and other charms. She laid it over her wrist and fumbled with the fastener. "I never can get this bitch to snap," she complained.

"Would you like me to do it?" asked Sawyer. "I've a steady hand."

Cecilia hesitated, then came to her and held out her arm.

"Tell me," said Sawyer, working with the fastener, "what are gillipins?"

"What?"

"You said not to let it swell me up when I wasn't stewing it for the gillipins."

"Oh, that's circus lingo. You know, gillipins. The customers, the townspeople—the rubes. All the suckers you got cheering for you—like you had just done a swell triple somersault to the net. You got it fastened? Thanks. Now," she said, going to the bunk and fluffing

the pillow, "you just lay down and take it easy." As Sawyer lay on the bed Cecilia poured water on a rag, squeezed it, and gently placed the cloth on Sawyer's brow. "There you are, kiddo—this ain't the smoothest ride in the world but it's keeping us on our way."

"Thank you, Miss Trevaine," said Sawyer.

Cecilia stopped the wagon with a shout out the window and stepped down. Sawyer took off the cloth, lifted herself to an elbow, and watched Cecilia close the door from the outside. Then, her lips curving in a self-satisfied smile, she said softly, "*He* used to be able to do it, Miss Trevaine, but you couldn't—not now. You didn't even touch me."

With a nod of self-approval, she lay back and replaced the cloth and put her hands under her head. Well, she thought, here you are, riding with a circus. Sawyer Tyndall, pioneer de luxe, riding out to the frontier in the red circus wagon of the Sulphur Nightingale. Isn't it fun?

Without answering her question, Sawyer lay still for a while, until, getting restless, she took off the warm, damp cloth and went to the window on the shady side. She stood looking out, passing the time by counting the conveyances crawling south-westward.

An hour before sunset the cage train reached a good-sized creek along which scores of settlers' wagons had been drawn up for the night. The circus' baggage train had arrived some time before, and had unhitched some distance away from the area chosen by the homesteaders. The circus cooks had a field kitchen going and roustabouts were setting up tables for the troupe. Cecilia Trevaine's private wagon was driven under a cottonwood tree near the creek bank and unhitched there.

Sawyer came out and sat on the rear steps.

Far downstream the circus elephant, which had padded along with the baggage train, was cooling itself by blowing water from its trunk over its back, to the delight of half a hundred children standing on the bank. Nearer upstream horses were being led into shallows to drink. Still nearer women knelt by the edge washing babies and clothes, and above them people were dipping water for drinking and cooking.

Cecilia Trevaine was walking through the grass toward Sawyer when a cook sang out, "Joe blow!" Cecilia beckoned and Sawyer got up and joined her. They strolled to a table where Grossett, Foster, and a man whose name Sawyer didn't catch but who was identified as the circus treasurer, were waiting. She was surprised to see sterling silver and good china spread on damask.

"A toast!" said Grossett when they were seated. He got to his feet, his skinny hand holding up a glass of claret through which the sinking

sun sparkled. "To the Queen of the Kiowa-Comanche country," he said, bowing to Sawyer. She nodded and laughed, as they drank to her. And then lifted her own glass in response. "To the queen's dauntless rescuers!" Grossett clapped for more wine. The liveried Negro who had driven the victoria refilled the glasses and continued serving through supper.

An assortment of human-like beings were eating off the bare boards of a nearby table. Cecilia entertained Sawyer with gossip about their specialities and their domestic troubles and their eccentricities. The bearded lady, the dog-faced boy, the India rubber man, the human skeleton, the sword-swallower, the fat lady, the snake charmer, the man-with-the-longest-hair-in-the-world, the giant, the midget couple, and all the rest. When Sawyer discovered that they were staring at her as fascinated as she was by them, their glances betraying that they were talking among themselves about her, she was pleased. It was amusing to be discussed as remarkable by an assortment of freaks.

A caravan of prairie schooners lumbered by heading for the array of homestead wagons down the creek. Sawyer sat up as she recognised young Fremont driving the second wagon. Her eyes went down the line. Overton Dunbar driving the fifth wagon. And Allen Dunbar, astride a sorrel pony, at the rear. At the moment she saw him, he was nudging the pony to a trot to overtake the head of the caravan. His attire made her smile. Blue denim pants, stuffed into boots, small grey western hat, a pistol holster strapped to his side. Depend on Allen Dunbar to dress properly for any occasion. But he *did* ride well. Oh, of course, cavalry lieutenant. She might have known Allen would never appear in public doing anything unless he did it superlatively well.

Sawyer impulsively got to her feet, called, and waved. He reined his pony over and she walked a little way to meet him. He got down smiling. "Having a good trip?"

"Oh yes. Are you?" She saw his eyes critically taking in her companions at the nearby table. She laughed nervously: "What an adventurous time I'm having!"

Cecilia sauntered over to them. "Howdy, tall fellow," she said insinuatingly.

"Oh, this is Mr. Dunbar, Miss Trevaine. "He's—a friend of mine."

Cecilia closed one eye to size him up. "Nice friend." A shadow of distaste crossed Allen's face. Sawyer said hastily, "I'm riding in Miss Trevaine's wagon. You see——" Cecilia, putting a hand on Allen's right bicep, squeezed it experimentally. "Nice muscle." Sawyer's mouth opened in horror. As she expected, Allen stiffly freed himself. "Well," he said, swinging into the saddle, "I must be going."

"Allen!" said Sawyer. He drew rein. "I didn't get to tell you. Mr.

Foster's buggy fell over a cliff and had a wheel broken and I was knocked unconscious and the circus came along and picked us up."

"I'm very sorry you were injured," he said. "You're all right now?"

"Oh yes!"

"You're sure there's nothing I can do?"

"No, there's nothing."

Again his critical eye glanced at the table. "Well—we'll see each other at the new town. Right?"

She nodded uncertainly and he trotted off after his father's caravan. "Sweet boy," said Cecilia. Sawyer angrily refused even to glance at her. They strolled back to the table and it wasn't until she began to transfer her anger to Allen for having acted so superior that Sawyer responded to anything Cecilia said.

When they got up from the table Sawyer noticed that Oof had been squatting in the grass beyond Cecilia's place eating from a tin plate. She had casually supposed that the titbits Cecilia had been handing down were going to a dog.

After supper, Sawyer and Cecilia sat in the dark on the rear steps of the wagon. Fireflies winked in the underbrush along the creek. The south breeze was not as hot as it had been during the day. Cecilia's cubeb glowed with each drag she took. Sawyer, in better humour by now, mentioned that the aromatic smoke was pleasant and Cecilia took the packet from her skirt pocket and offered her one. Sawyer declined, then changed her mind. "They're not really cigarettes," said Cecilia. "They're medicinal; I take 'em for my throat."

"Oh," said Sawyer, lighting awkwardly from Cecilia's match, "I'd hoped they were real ones." She decided the smoke smelled better than it tasted.

"Tell me," said Sawyer suddenly. "Why are you going to the new town?"

"Me?" asked Cecilia. "Why, for the same reason you are, honey."

Sawyer glanced at her questioningly.

"For the dough," said Cecilia. "Like everybody is, including the thistle chins. For the good old dough-re-mi."

"We was going along a road in Missouri one night," she went on reminiscently. "Pourin' down rain, having to stop every five minutes while the jumbo nudged a wagon out of a mudhole. I was about fed up. Angus was in the wagon with me—we was trying to play cards but he was too damn twidgety. I says to him, 'Angus, you want to be smart? You want a really smart idea?' He says yes, so I tells him we ought to head for this land lottery, playing one night stands as far as El Reno, then coming on down for the cleanup. 'Well,' he says, 'let's

not be hasty. It looks rather fraught with risks and dangers of various kinds to me. For instance, Indians. I ain't craving to be scalped.' 'Oh Christ,' I says, 'how could an Indian scalp you? Besides, they've all been tamed.' That jumpy way of his like he's about to be goosed gives me the ruddy. 'I'm getting sick and tired,' I says, 'of playing to Missouri rubes and getting my salary in the dark half of the time. I'm an artist who could be doing twenty times as well with half a dozen outfits I know of. Get that,' I says, '—an artist! Now either you do like I say or I'm walking out and going down there myself. And don't think I won't do all right,' I says. 'I've got everything Lillian Russell's got except Diamond Jim and maybe more.' Well, he sees I'm right—the stupe couldn't get along without me—so here we are. Headin' for the dough. Not for as much as you, lucky honey, but the idea's the same."

Sawyer puffed and blew the smoke out slowly.

"What are you going to do with all the dough?" asked Cecilia.

"I don't even know when I'll get it," said Sawyer. "I have to live on the tract for a while before I can sell lots for residences."

"Not for too long, I hope. From what I'm seeing of this country, they should give it back to the Indians. Or import some Ayrabs. Jesus," she sighed, "I wish I was in your place."

"What would you do?"

"Head for New York. Live at the Astor, eat at Delmonico's—You ever been to New York?"

"No."

"Great little town. I studied voice there, when I was about your age, back in '84. Oh, oh—there I go, giving my age away. I guess it was later than '84—I'm not but twenty-nine really."

She glanced sidewise at Sawyer but there was no indication of disbelief in the dim profile. Sawyer only said, "You studied in New York? That must have been grand."

"Yeah, I came riding in from Boston. My people was wealthy. They sent me. I was going to set the world on fire. Concert singer, grand opera. Christ."

"Why didn't you?"

"Didn't I what? Grand opera? Oh the teachers said my voice didn't have it. Hell of a lot they knew. Then I met a fella—the bastard—and after that, you know, down in the dumps, trying to get along, wouldn't go home and have to face everybody. Singing and dancing in a chorus, screwing around. You know how it is. You never know how your life will turn out, do you?"

"No," said Sawyer. To herself, she wondered whether Cecilia Trevaine thought she'd swallow that incredible story. Wealthy parents? Grand opera? Sawyer was too adroit at making up stories about her-

self not to recognise an implausible job. But even so, she thought pityingly, didn't Cecilia have as much right as she to wish to be thought a more fortunate person than life had let her be? Except that she lacked Sawyer's ability to make the pretence convincing, what real difference was there between Cecilia's yearning and her own, she asked herself. "I'm sorry you've had such a bad time," she said.

"Well, you didn't ask for the story of my life. But you kind of puzzle me, kiddo—you've got such a pretty style about you—and I wanted you to know that I too— Well, anyway, if I had your dough, I'd really blow for New York and show 'em some of my old style." She rose. "It's up early in the morning for the grand entry. You take my bunk and I'll get Oof to get me a cot from the baggage train."

"Oh, but I don't want to take your bunk——"

"Keep it. You're not over your bump yet and you'll be more comfortable. I feel like a star pitch to-night. I'm a little lonesome somehow."

She went into the wagon to get a couple of blankets.

A figure came shadowy into sight.

"Who is it?" asked Sawyer.

"Me. Barney. Came over to talk a little and say good night. Are you all right?"

"Fine."

"Where's Miss Trevaine?"

Cecilia came out, a blanket on an arm.

"Hey there," said Cecilia. She stepped down and started walking off.

"Where are you going?" asked Forster.

"I supposed you two wanted to gab. I'm going off to bed somewhere."

"Oh, it's so late, Sawyer probably wants to turn in too. How about walking back with you?"

"Why not? It probably won't kill either one of us."

Sawyer exchanged good night with them, and the couple walked off into the darkness. As they went, Sawyer overheard Foster say in a lowered voice, "Here's a riddle. What's slower than a woman getting undressed?" Though Sawyer didn't hear the answer, Cecilia's husky laugh and a loud, "Now, you old thing, you—stop it!" floated back.

Sawyer grimaced. It was annoying that Barney Foster should elect to walk with a woman like Cecilia Trevaine instead of staying and talking with her. Not much of a compliment, his making such a bald-faced choice. She searched for an excuse for him that would appease her wounded vanity and concluded that God no doubt put women like Cecilia Trevaine in this world so that men could have their base side satisfied without imperilling the virtue of good women like her-

self. Oh, don't be so smug and don't jump to such vile conclusions, she thought impatiently. Just because they take a little stroll . . . She leaned back and studied the stars, and found it dull, then looked down the creek to the glowing cookfires and lanterns of the homesteaders, where the Dunbars were. Well, Allen Dunbar could look down at her from the height of a horse if he wanted to, but her money and the general esteem in which she was now held had made her once more the equal of the Dunbars, substantial Philadelphia family though they were. After a while, she heard Cecilia giggle huskily, somewhere in the darkness over by the creek.

Contemptuous of the lowness of some women, and angry with the way men sometimes acted, Sawyer abruptly got up and went into the wagon.

When they set out in the repaired buggy next morning, after breakfasting with Grossett and his treasurer—Cecilia Trevaine was asleep on a cot under a distant tree—Sawyer was still somewhat annoyed with Barney. And she was made even more so by the deprecating way he referred to Cecilia.

They had forded the creek, and were going at a fast trot across the prairie once more, when he said, "Queer bunch, those circus people. I hated to have that tough Trevaine woman imposed on you."

She tilted her parasol away and looked at him sharply. "You thought she was tough?"

"She certainly was!"

"Do you think that's very gallant of you?"

His black-specked green eyes flicked her face. "What do you mean, Sawyer?"

"Your calling her tough hardly seems a fitting expression of gratitude."

"Oh." He said nothing more for a moment, and Sawyer, blushing for having spoken so boldly on such a topic, tilted her parasol so he couldn't see her face. She could tell he was scratching matches on the underside of the seat, trying to get a cigar going. "Listen, Sawyer," he said gravely, "in the first place, you're mistaken. There was nothing like that. In the second place, even if there had been, it wouldn't have meant anything. For a man a thing like that doesn't mean any more than going into a store to buy a cigar——"

"I don't think it's a proper subject for me to hear about," said Sawyer crisply from her side of the parasol. "I'm sure it's not. And certainly, such a thing could be none of my affair."

"Sawyer——"

"Please, Mr. Foster. It's very embarrassing. I must insist."

They rode in silence for half an hour. By the end of that time, Sawyer concluded he had been sufficiently punished, and said pleasantly, "When do you think we'll reach the edge of our new country?"

"Why," said Foster, "we've been in it since yesterday afternoon."

"Barney!" she said, dismayed. "Oh, why didn't you tell me?"

"You were riding in Trevaine's wagon—and last night I forgot to mention it."

"I'm so disappointed. I wanted to know the exact minute! I planned to get down and stand on it."

Foster started to pull the mare to a halt. "I'm awfully sorry. You can get down now if you want to."

She shook her head. "No, drive on. It's too late now."

"See those little mounds of white-washed rocks dotting the prairie? Those mark the corners of the hundred-and-sixty-acre farms. Yes, we're well beyond Oklahoma Territory and in our own."

Sawyer looked around. Though the landscape actually was no different to the eye, she *sensed* a difference. Her surroundings gave her a new feeling; it was a *better* prairie than the one they had crossed. Her fleet of ships were acting differently too. Most of them still headed south-west, but now there were other wagons going in different directions: families riding about examining the marked-off farms preliminary to making their choices. Sometimes a man would get down and walk over the ground, or turn the sod with a spade to determine the depth of the topsoil.

Then, as they went over a rise, Sawyer glimpsed ahead and far to the right a compact jumble of mountains rising abruptly from the prairie. "I didn't know we had mountains!"

"I understood they were here," said Foster. "They rise about ten miles north-west of the townsite and run about thirty miles to the west before subsiding. Pretty colour."

"The colour of enchantment! Are they really purple?"

"Likely the haze of distance. And I don't suppose a native of the Rockies would even admit they're mountains—they're really big hills."

"They're not!" cried Sawyer defensively. "They're wonderful mountains."

As they rode on into the parched south wind, occasionally a little whirlwind six to ten feet tall appeared and swept up dust and grass in its column. To Sawyer, they were like genii materialising from the earth and spinning frolicsomenely around her, to provide a welcoming escort.

They topped a rise . . .

"There!" Foster rose and pointed ahead. "There it is, Sawyer. Home sweet home."

Before the buggy had stopped, Sawyer was on her feet. She tilted her parasol against the sun and peered into the distance.

A great encampment was spread over a wide slope slanting away toward a dry, white river bed a mile beyond. There were thousands of tents, most of them brown or grey, but many were blue or red, orange or striped. Everywhere in the thin haze of dust and smoke toy-sized figures and vehicles moved about.

"Why," exclaimed Sawyer with delight, "it's like Baghdad! It's like the Thousand and One Nights. Isn't it, Barney?"

"Maybe," he admitted, "but a dusty one."

"Oh, let's hurry!" she said, sitting down, but leaning forward, not taking her eyes from the scene.

The red buggy wheels spun again, and they entered the encampment.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SAWYER had decided before she left El Reno exactly which costume she would wear when she attended the opening of the townsite and claimed her land. She had packed it with special care, wrapping it in tissue paper and folding it into a cardboard box. First, though, she dressed in the linen dress she had worn on the trip down, went out for breakfast, then returned to make up her bed, No. 8 in the long row of iron bedsteads running the length of the right half of the canvas-partitioned tent hotel (Gents to the Left, Ladies to the Right).

Since early morning there had been a great to-do in the women's side. Mothers scrubbed children in the shower room at the rear, holding them under perforated barrels of water which were suspended overhead, and then dressed them in starched Sunday best. They, too, got out their own finest from trunks and spruced themselves while children romped the length of the grass floor.

Despite their coloured gowns, none of the women had a chance of looking as smart as she did in her Clara Gebhart creation, of that Sawyer was sure. Her two petticoats were watered silk, with a wonderful rustly quality, and deeply edged with openwork. Her skirt and jacket were crepe de Chine, the gored skirt smooth over her thighs, then flaring excitingly in a bell bottom, so that it swayed and twisted about her when she turned, and the puffed sleeves of the tight jacket broadened her shoulders and made her small waist look even smaller. The only ornamentation was the brave white frogging of the jacket's three buttonholes, and the only relief in the array of white silk was a black glass butterfly on the left lapel, which Miss Clara had said she could either wear or not, depending on how she felt about it. She felt she needed it. She put on her hat with special care: made of finely woven white horsehair, it was worn jauntily well forward. Miss Clara had designed it with a satirical deference to the sun and wind; it had a kind of miniature sun-visor effect at the front, and besides one long pin with a white butterfly knob there was a satin ribbon which circled the back of her head. The hat looked tiny and absurdly useless perched on Sawyer's surging hair, and that was why she adored it. She had four pairs of white shoes from which to choose, and, though she knew oxfords would be the most sensible considering the amount of walking she would have to do, she selected the pair of extremely high heels, in order to intensify the emotion of slender stateliness she felt to-day.

The townsite would be opened at ten o'clock, and Sawyer had been instructed to appear at the land office at that hour to claim the first

farm. She was ready thirty minutes ahead of time, impatient, with nothing to do but chat with the other women and modestly accept their compliments.

These women, who had come from so many different places, would henceforth be neighbours, living next door or in the next street. They chattered away in the bright spirit of new acquaintanceship, interrupting occasionally to whack an unruly child or call out a "Don't do that!" They told one another what their husbands did for a living, they discovered one another's church affiliations, special talents, likes and dislikes, the air was filled with all sorts of "Oh my!" and "How nice!" and "You don't say!"

The women and children were called for by their men, until only Sawyer and a slight young woman, lying abed nursing a baby, were left. The woman's husband was going without her to the townsite to try and buy a lot for a shoe repair shop. Sawyer brought her a pitcher of water, and they talked a while; Sawyer learned that the seven-months-old baby was named Victoria because she had been born the day Queen Victoria died.

All the while Sawyer fidgeted. Oh, why doesn't Barney come, she thought. I can't wait!

At last the hotel manager called her name. Sawyer snatched up her gloves and pocket-book and hurried to the front. Not Barney, but a lean, bony man with a silver toothpick stuck in his mouth waited. Foster, he explained, had found himself so involved in business that he wondered if Mr. Carver, who was a real estate man, might escort her.

She was disappointed. She had counted on Barney's company; she wanted to see his expression of happiness for her sake. Oh, well, it didn't matter who went; she only wanted to get about it. She and Carver started out.

In the street the south wind shoved her along as if it, too, were impatient. The way was deep in pulverised dust and grass litter and a sheet of dust skimmed the ground and at times planed upward and puffed to a cloud which rolled away over the tent tops. My goodness, thought Sawyer, how long will I stay clean?

They turned west at a corner. Sawyer became aware that she was one of a growing procession of men and women who were coming out of their tents and streaming in a common direction. Everybody was friendly and cheerful. People nodded if their eyes happened to meet, the smiles on the sunburnt faces saying, "Well, here we go." She was not unconscious of the glances at her costume. She was by far the best dressed woman in the crowd.

From time to time they passed a group of store tents, streamers

proclaiming that inside might be bought groceries or drugs or harness or the like. Most such tents and their stocks had been partly dismantled and reloaded in wagons; their owners were preparing to move to the townsite.

Near the west edge of the encampment, where the procession had grown to such proportions that there was a rubbing of shoulders, Sawyer began to observe piles of new, yellow lumber. Many wagons were being loaded high from the piles. Standing about were a number of frame buildings, newly erected and mounted on solid barrel-like wheels to be rolled to permanent locations.

All around the limits of the townsite the people stood three or four feet deep, waiting for the last minutes to tick away. Again, the hawkers with clusters of bright balloons and the vendors of peanuts and confections were raucously present. Sawyer pushed her way to the front of the crowd. She had heard people about her whisperingly pointing her out to their neighbours. She held her head high and stood confidently.

She saw before her an empty, human-bordered two square miles of prairie, without a tree, marked with hundreds of stake, and sloping gently to the south. Cavalrymen patrolled the limits, keeping everybody off. A lone building, the land office shack, stood in the centre. There were four auction stands spaced far apart—two for residence lots and two for business lots; proceeds from the sale of lots would go to public buildings, roads, and bridges.

As Sawyer stood with the thousands and gazed at this magic plot, it struck her as fantastic that a complete town would spring up here. This was the last day this land could be looked upon and seen unweighted and empty. Usually, she thought to herself, a town grew slowly through the years, and there was no awareness on any one day that the town had grown larger. But pressed about this ground were thirty thousand people and they were townless. With the wave of a wand, they would be a town of thirty thousand. Here they stood, with hardly more than their hands to serve them, and they had between them not a house, or a school, or a sewer, or a store, or a well, or a church, or a street. Only a piece of vacant ground. And they could hardly wait to begin . . .

Sawyer expected a shot or a bugle or something of the sort to signal the opening. All that happened was the cavalrymen, obeying an unperceived order, suddenly left off their patrolling and trotted toward the land office.

After a minute or two, a few men ventured out on the site. When they weren't ordered back, a score followed them tentatively. Then, with a rush, the thousands flowed inward from the borders.

Sawyer kept in the vanguard of the crowd; Carver hurried alongside

her. Holding up the folds of her skirt, she made directly for the land office, though she had to glance at the ground frequently to avoid the clumps of long-needed prickly pear.

A rumpled old gentleman stood in the doorway of the shack. "Well, well, well," he cried at her approach, "here is our first customer."

She nodded. She was afraid to trust her voice.

Once she was inside, the old man sat behind a desk and went about making out the necessary papers with much peering and squinting, his hands trembling a little from anxiety over his responsibility. His trembling increased her own nervousness. He invited her to sit, but she preferred to stand. A clerk led her to a large wall map. "You've the No. 1 ticket and you can have any of them you want. This one, though, is the one which may be offered as an addition to the town."

"That's the one," said Sawyer breathlessly. "That's mine!"

"Just walk about eight hundred yards north from here and you'll be on it."

The clerk called out the legal description of the farm, and the old man put his face close to the paper and carefully drew the proper letters and figures. Not yet into the routine, the old man almost forgot to give her a copy of the homestead law. He got so excited about the near-omission that he leaped up to call her back and waved copies at her with both hands. The only other occupant of the shack was an army sergeant who had tilted his chair against the wall and who occasionally spat a stream of tobacco juice to the floor.

Again, Sawyer was a little disappointed by the absence of ceremony. She hadn't exactly expected speeches and bouquets perhaps, but the occasion was too important for such informality. She felt as if everybody outside might have paused and gathered round while she received the papers.

A line of farmers had formed at the door, though not as spectators. They were waiting their turn. Holding numbers below two hundred, they were entitled to choose on the first day; on successive days higher and higher groups of two hundred would make their choices until the thirteen thousand farms had been claimed.

Sawyer turned to Carver.

"If you don't mind, I think I'd like to go and see it by myself."

"Sure," he said, "I've plenty to do. It's been a pleasure."

She went round the cavalymen squatting in the shade of the shack playing mumbly-peg, and began walking north through the crowd, walking moderately at first, then a little faster.

The wind had died. Through the glitter, currents of townspeople criss-crossed and eddied. By couples, alone, or by families they examined and discussed the staked sites. In the crowds around the auctioneers,

men who had decided began offering up bids. And in the tones of those Sawyer walked past, and in the cries of the bidders, there was a new note, different from anything she had heard before.

All of them were finally *there*, that was the thing. The frustrated, the dispossessed, the adventurous, the dissatisfied, the keen, the yearful, the ambitious, all the seekers after a new life—they were finally there. The uneasy decision, the uprooting, the arduous journey, all those were behind now; before them the final act, the actual possession of a parcel of earth where the dream could at last materialise. In the mind of every man and woman was the exquisite picture of the perfect home, the perfect yard, the perfect street running before it, the perfect store, or office, or shop; and if all the beautiful pictures could have been assembled there would have been a view of the perfect town standing on this gentle slope where only the grass, the goldenrod, the milkweed and prickly pear had prevailed.

The first dream to crystallise appeared. Out from the encampment to Sawyer's right rolled a one-storey frame building with a two-storey front, drawn by six teams. The sun flashed on a window pane as a carpenter riding inside fitted a sash. Across the high front a uncompleted red-lettered sign reading GOTTLEIB'S MERCAN blazoned wetly. A painter carrying ladder and bucket walked alongside, ready to resume his lettering as soon the building reached its destination. Ahead of the teams trotted a pudgy man in bottle-green suit and pearl-grey bowler, showing the way. Occasionally he stopped and took off his hat and wiped his brow until the teams had almost caught up, then he trotted on again.

Sawyer suddenly felt an impulse to run toward the plain lying flat at the top of the slope. She did walk as fast as she could. With each step a puff of dust was shaken from the grass and wild flowers. Some of it lifting lazily settled on her skirt, some of it missed and resignedly sank again in her wake. She was breathing hard when she finally stopped. She had left the crowds behind. There were no stakes here—

Her own land. She was standing on it. She became aware of the feel of the ground through the soles of her shoes. She did not want to move, to break the contact. She and the land—the sensation was inescapable in her heightened mood—a current flowed between them.

This is mine. Mine, mine! The rest of the world isn't but this is mine.

She began walking about the land, her eyes rejoicing at every newly discovered feature of it. She saw that she owned a number of the mud-cracked shallow depressions which she had learned were old buffalo wallows. She decided the clumps of prickly pear were not such horrid little menaces after all—at least hers weren't; the clusters were of cunning design. She picked a bouquet of coneflowers and black-eyed Susans

and Queen Anne's Lace. They were quite the prettiest flowers she had ever seen. She knelt in a drift of bluebonnets—she had not noticed before that there were so many flowers blooming on the prairie—and ran a hand lightly over them. "You're mine now," she whispered. "Did you know that? And," smiling, "I suppose I'm yours too now." The flowers bent in a little breeze. A shadow passed over the land. She looked up. Cottony clouds had soared over the horizon; they floated at a majestic height. The loveliest spot and the loveliest day she had ever seen. An awkward spider ambled through the bluebonnets. "And you, you nasty thing, you're mine too now, and you'd better behave."

She rose and threw out her arms and arched her back and stretched, as if awakening from a sleep.

A little later, the men whom Foster had promised to send out arrived with a tent, her baggage, and a few pieces of furniture which she had purchased as cheaply as possible the afternoon before. She could hardly wait for them to set up the tent, get her things moved inside, and rig a clothesline between two-by-four posts out back.

When the men had at last departed, Sawyer went into the tent and paused by the centre pole. She had never suspected how complete could be a sense of triumph. She stood in a dwelling which was hers. From here, one could look serenely on a world and sally out to participate or withdraw at will. To be able to withdraw . . . to know the whereabouts of a final refuge . . . never again to flee down dark streets terrified that not anywhere was there a door she could enter. What though her dwelling was no more than a square brown tent with a floor of grass? It was hers. It stood in readiness for all returnings.

She surveyed the interior. Against the back wall, a brass double bed; on its mattress, folded new sheets, pillows and pillowcases. Beside it, a small carpet, so the grass wouldn't tickle her bare feet when she swung them out of bed. Against one side wall, a chest of drawers with mirror, and her lantern, suitcase and trunk. As well, a tin-topped washstand bearing matching flower-painted pitcher, basin, and, behind the doors, a commode. Near the middle of the tent, two straight chairs. Near the opposite side wall, kerosene stove, a gallon of coal oil, a bench with two washtubs, soap, starch, and blueing. And cooking utensils, flat-iron, ironing board, dishes, knives and forks, and a dozen other such odds and ends.

Why this, she suddenly realised, was going to be like playing house. Compartmented in this interior were the same parlour, bedroom, and kitchen she had indicated with lines drawn in the dirt of the backyard in Raleigh. Then, she had had to imagine most of the furniture, except when, as in the case of a stove, she would lay a board across two

stones. Now everything was *real*. What would she have given when she was ten for a real tent for a playhouse!

She tossed away her hat, and sailed into putting her house in order. First, she opened her trunk and took out dresses to air and unwrinkle on a line strung across the interior of the tent. Clean underthings and her personal articles she put in the bureau drawers. By the time she started making up her bed, she was uttering occasional exclamations aloud, as once she had done to her doll while they went about the tasks of housekeeping. She put the lantern on the bureau, and decided she really ought to buy a shaded lamp, it would look so much nicer. But it was easy to imagine the lantern *was* a lamp.

She heard a voice outside call, "Like some water, Mrs. Tyndall?" She went to the opening.

A wagon with a wooden iron-bound tank mounted on it had drawn up. The man climbing down was one of a dozen waterman who had been making the rounds of the encampment, selling water pumped from the river; they would continue to serve the town until wells had been dug.

"Yes! I should like some."

Snaking the canvas hose inside, the waterman filled tubs, pail, pitcher, and basin.

"How much is it?"

"I'm cheaper than some wagons—dollar a barrel, fifteen cents a pail." Grinning, he lifted a hand as she reached for her pocket-book. "First round is on me, Mrs. Tyndall."

She paid him with a smile.

"You'll probably find that water a mite warm," he said. "In fact, to be on the safe side, it might be a good idea to blow on it before you try to drink it. No frogs or crawdads, though; I got a strainer on *my* pump."

He looked about, curious to see how her establishment compared with other tents he had been in. He was red-faced and friendly.

"Ought to get you an icebox, if you can find one. Some fellows had two carloads of ice sent down to the railhead and they're racing it on down under canvas."

"Do you know how to work this stove?" she asked. "I've been reading the label but I somehow don't quite see how."

"Sure, I'll start it for you. First thing you do—see here—"

When he had two steady blue flames going, he lifted one of the tubs of water on to the stove for her—"Though," he said, "it don't hardly need any more heating."

As he pulled the canvas hose outside, he saw and stepped on a tarantula which was crawling into the tent. Its black body was big as a dollar and its hairy legs quivered in death.

"Good thing I got that for you."

She shuddered. He grinned his thanks for the shudder.

"And if you're afraid of snakes," he said, getting up on the wagon, "find yourself a bunch of empty whisky bottles and stick 'em in by the necks all around your tent. No snake'll go by 'em."

"I'll remember that." A sudden gust of wind raised a puff of dust in her face. "Goodness!" she said, the grit grinding her teeth, "does the wind blow this way all the time?"

No sooner had she said it than she anticipated his answer. It was the joke of the day. "No'm," he grinned, "it don't. Sometimes it blows the other way. Giddap."

The waterman's easy wit made her feel more lighthearted than ever.

She decided to wash some things, now that she had water. She took off her jacket, slipped a house dress over her head, and stepped out of her skirt, which she carefully folded away in a drawer. By the time she had soaked a tubful of garments, finished unpacking her trunk, washed the clothing and hung it on the line outside to dry, she was dripping with perspiration. She wasn't tired, though; she was keyed high with energy.

She examined carefully the side flaps to make sure they were lashed down securely, then she tightly laced the opening vent. There was not a crack anywhere. She had saved some water. More than anything else just now, she wanted a bath.

The act of undressing stirred a feeling of defencelessness. For the first time she had a slight misgiving about living alone. It had been in Barney's mind, too, when he said, "I don't altogether like the idea of your being there by yourself, Sawyer, but the law says *you* have to homestead it. You'll be all right, of course, though I'd give you a pistol if I thought you'd know how to use it." ("No, no, I wouldn't!") "Anyway, I'll send out a blacksnake whip with the tent. There never was a scoundrel who could stand up to a woman with a whip in her hand."

There was the whip, coiled beneath the bed. With a stockinged toe she nudged it farther under. She would never be able to see a whip again without an involuntary image of Cecilia Trevaine's tattooed behind.

Oh . . . there weren't any scoundrels in this place. Everyone was courteous and gallant—like the waterman. Her tent was set up near the south edge of her land, closest to the town itself. The sounds muffled by the canvas, she could hear hammering and sawing mounting to orchestral proportions, a jumble of voices raised to combat the wind, a pounding of tent stakes, the clank of trace chains, the creak of shrunken wagon spokes. She had only to cry once for help, and hundreds of men would come running.

Even so, she could not bring herself to undress completely. She kept

on her chemise while she stood in the tub and washed herself, though it meant getting the chemise splashed.

Afterward, she sat for half an hour luxuriantly brushing out her hair until its reddish tint gleamed. Whenever her arms tired from the brushing, she changed to doing her nails for a while.

She became aware that for some time she had absently been whistling a snatch of some tune or other. She hadn't whistled since she was a gangling twelve. She heard Uncle Daniel's smiling admonition, "Whistling girl and cackling hen, sure to come to no good end."

"Oh yes?" she said, getting up and going to the bureau mirror.

She did up her hair the way Clara Gebhart had ordered: piled high on her head in a pompadour with the knot in a loop at the nape of her neck. With her abundance of hair, she did not need rats to hold up the puffs.

Then, feeling fresh and crisp in a clean white skirt and starched shirtwaist, she went out to see if her wash was dry. She stared at the flapping line. The things were dry, but garments that had been white were a dismal grey.

She was in too good humour to be dismayed. "You idiot! How could you have forgotten the dust? But how will I ever get anything clean?"

She began gathering them in.

Giggles behind her.

She whirled.

Two fat Indian women and a tall heavy Indian had come up silently.

"What do you want?" she faltered.

The bright-blanketed women giggled, eyes downcast, peeping up at her shyly.

The Indian man smiled. "My crazy squaw, Tall Flower, her crazy sister. Falling Leaf, they think your hair pretty. Want to touch."

"Oh."

The women sidled up timidly. Sawyer stood motionless. They tentatively reached out their hands. She steeled herself against drawing back. One quick touch, and the women jerked away their hands.

"Pretty? Pretty?" they chirped.

"Thank you."

"You're Mrs. Tyndall," declared the Indian.

"How did you know?"

"I heard about you, gonna have this. Old Geronimo, army let him outa jail to see the fun, he tell me about you. He write his name on a paper and sell to white men for two-bits, he tell he trade his name to Mrs. Tyndall for her name for nothin'."

"I remember," said Sawyer, laughing. "Yesterday. A newspaper reporter got us to trade autographs. He's a charming old man."

The Indian pointed to the north-west where several hundred skin tepees were pitched.

"You see there? That's our camp."

Sawyer had seen the tepees—wigwams was the word she thought of—and moving about them blanketed Indians and dogs and ponies. She had wondered if they stayed there all the time. A possibility of Indians for neighbours hadn't occurred to her.

"I, Limpin' Bear, say you need something, you come and see me."

"Do you—is that your permanent camp?"

"We live on farms up round the mountains most of the time now. Army say so. We keep a big pasture from where the tepees are to the mountains. A bunch of us come and pitch tepees to see white man's fun a little while. We put on a show too. You come to our show. War dance, drums, holler up. We make out like we tie a white man to the stake. Much fun. Two-bits. Every night. You come."

"I'll try as soon as I get settled. This land of mine belonged to you too, didn't it?"

"Belong?" The Indian pursed his lips. He shrugged. "I hunt all round here, down in Texas too, long piece all round. I never think much about it. You come and fool around here a little while. Okay. By-'n-by you go, somebody else will come and fool around here a little while, then he will go too. I've heard white man talk about land belonging to this man, belonging to that man. I never savvy. Okay while a man fools around maybe, then no. Maybe so." He smiled. "I hope Mrs. Tyndall fools around a long time."

Sawyer realised that one of the Indian women, Falling Leaf, had begun taking down her wash and was throwing the things over an arm. She started to cry out for her to stop.

"Big white squaw don't need to wash," the woman chirped, shaking her head disapprovingly. "I wash, and you pay."

Tall Flower giggled.

Her arms full, Falling Leaf swayed off in the direction of the Indian camp. Whether she would ever see her things again, Sawyer could not be sure, but she suspected they would be returned immaculate. Just how the miracle would be performed, she had no idea.

To his giggling squaw Limping Bear said, "Come!"

Sawyer watched the three of them go swiftly and easily across the land. It was a formal departure, as if they were vacating in favour of the new tenant.

She had exhausted the possibilities for housekeeping in the tent for the time being. There simply wasn't anything else that needed doing. A gnawing in her stomach reminded her that she hadn't had a bite

since breakfast, and it must be well on into the afternoon. If she went to see Barney—she was eager tell him all she had accomplished—he might take her to supper.

She pinned on her hat, scrutinising her face in the mirror to be sure all was well with it, then tied the ribbon behind her ear, buttoned her jacket, puffed up the white stock at her throat, and set out.

She hadn't looked toward the town since mid-morning. She was astonished by how much had been done. Tents dotted the site, there were frame skeletons of buildings going up on every hand. People worked and scurried about like a colony of ants. Wagons drawing lumber to the voracious carpenters no longer could cut across lots; they were forced to follow the street lines.

As she walked into the town, Sawyer noticed that at the rear of hundreds of lots yellow-pine privies had been erected. That was another thing she would have to get. There was so much one had to think about in setting up a home!

When she reached the business district, she discovered that scores of establishments were operating. There was a barber shop, for example, which had a striped pole out front but which was only a wooden platform on which were three barber chairs; the barbers were shaving customers while carpenters nailed up studding around them. She passed a bank—a painted board said South-western National Bank—which was no more than a rectangular pen made of a double height of hog fencing. Holes were cut at the front for paying and receiving windows and lines of men stood before them depositing or withdrawing funds. Inside, the bank staff worked at pine kitchen tables beneath the blazing sun. The horseless carriage, which she had first seen in the freight wagon on the prairie, stood on blocks near the rear of the bank.

A furniture store's streamer billowed. The stock was in a tent at the rear of the lot; foundations were being dug for a building at the front of it. The skinny, freckled man who seemed to be supervising things told her he had two iceboxes left and he would send out one. He grinned and smirked, exposing two gold eyeteeth, and his coyness made her uncomfortable until she realised that he, too, was in a state of ecstasy induced by the excitement of the day.

At the next corner three newsboys were selling papers. She bought a *Sentinel*. The tabloid four-page issue had been hastily printed and was speckled with typographical errors, but it did tell a great deal of what had happened up till noon of that day. Most important—how breathtaking to see one's name in print—it reported that she had claimed her farm and moved on to it. The other boys clamoured that they had better papers. She bought from them a *Globe* and a *Herald*. The *Herald* had a nice story about her, but the *Globe* inexplicably had nothing. She

tossed the *Globe* away—it won't survive long, she decided—and folded the other two papers into her pocket-book.

She came upon Tad Dunbar selling lemonade from a washtub. He greeted her cheerily and offered her a free glass.

"I won't guarantee you'll like it," he said.

"Oh, it's good. But where did you find the lemons?"

"Only lemon in it is those slices you see floating for decoration. I made it with tartaric acid—just a little bottle makes a whole tubful. Learned how a long time ago."

"*You* didn't waste any time getting into business, did you? How's your father?"

"Oh, he's got a lot—over on Main Street—and him and Allen are putting up a building. Out of hay."

"Hay?"

"Alfalfa hay. Daddy found a thousand bales he could buy pretty cheap yesterday and he got the idea of building with them. Straw with bricks, Allen calls it. The walls are two bales thick and we'll spread tarpaulins for a roof. Daddy figures with so much competition—he sent me and Fremont around the encampment to count the hardware store signs and there was a hundred and two, and Daddy say's can't more than four or five last—Daddy figures the man who keeps thinking ahead will be most likely to succeed. He can sell the hay at a profit, see? A few bales at a time, starting with the back wall. Then as the hay goes he'll have carpenters start on a real building out of wood where the hay isn't any more. Besides, Daddy figures the novelty will make *his* hardware store stand out."

"It certainly should!"

"Smells good inside too. Want another glass?"

"Oh Tad!" exclaimed Sawyer. "Look!"

Tad swung around. A stray mule was sucking up the last of the tubful. "You old mule, you!" Tad howled. Then he groaned.

Sawyer took out a dollar bill. "Here, Tad, buy some more water and make another tubful. You can, can't you?"

"Oh, sure, I can make the lemonade easy enough. But I'm not sure I can find another lemon . . ."

Barney Foster had had a stroke of luck. Within three hours of his arrival, he had discovered that hundreds of farm families camping on the prairie round about were virtually penniless and that many actually had no food. He quickly proposed to as many merchants as he could buttonhole that some sort of relief be set up. So persuasively did he accomplish the task that before nightfall quantities of food and clothing had been donated and a headquarters established. A committee was

formed to distribute the charity, with Foster as chairman. A member of the committee, a druggist named Jerry Horner, suggested that the organisation be called the Barney Bacon and Beans Committee. Foster modestly objected, but was over-ruled. His alert civic-mindedness was productive of widespread favourable comment.

Late in the afternoon Foster was approaching his tent, which, still set in the encampment, had an American flag whipping from a pole in front. Trying to keep up with his long strides were a number of men who hurried along beside him like a pack of friendly, leaping dogs. As the party reached the tent, he was saying, "Gentlemen, I think your ideas are sound and progressive. If you'd like to call a meeting for a public discussion I'd be happy to appear as your speaker." The men wrung his hand and, after a few more words, departed.

Foster started to turn in when he saw Sawyer's white costume far up the street. He waited for her, waving as she drew near.

Sawyer noticed, above the Bacon and Beans banner across the tent, a new streamer reading: The Draft-Foster-for-Mayor Committee, Let's Start with a Decent Government, Come in.

"You've already opened your campaign!" she exclaimed.

Foster took off his big hat and pressed the tight curls of his black-and-silver hair. "So many people asked me to be a candidate I couldn't refuse," he said. He winked and she laughed. "Seriously, though," he went on, "anything to help get a good government started. And forgive me for neglecting you to-day. There was so much I had to do."

"Of course. And I've done so much! I know you're busy now . . ."

"Not too busy for you, Sawyer. Come in."

A number of men were talking in the front half of the tent.

"May I present these gentlemen, Mrs. Tyndall, who have also been persuaded to make themselves available for office. I think I can keep the names straight. Mr. Carver, the real estate man, whom you've met. This is Mr. Horner, who has a drug store; Mr. Snodgrass, who has the biggest, finest family I ever saw; Frank Everett, a restaurant owner, and Judge Tanner. If the people want a good man, which they will, Judge Tanner will be our first city attorney."

"The elected government—shall only have—nominal power—of course," said Judge Tanner, his Adam's apple jiggling with each pause. "With such a—lovely queen—it will be an honour—for us—to be obedient—to her enchanting—dictates." He bowed.

"I'm sure a real queen, sir," said Sawyer, "would insist on having you for prime minister—to be available for purposes of flattery."

"I'm going to get you away from the Judge," said Foster, and everybody laughed. "Come on back to my office."

Foster's "office" was behind a canvas partition hung midway across

the tent. An unmade cot was in one corner; in another corner, an open trunk. Half the trunk's contents were stacks of placards reading, Vote for Barney Foster.

"I'm all settled," said Sawyer, sitting across a kitchen table from him. "What do I do next?"

"I should think the next thing would be to arrange a loan on your farm."

"A loan?"

"The advantage of having a mortgage is that it will give you plenty of cash now instead of waiting till the lots are sold off to start getting it. Although you're supposed to homestead it a year before it's opened to sub-division, this townsite just isn't going to be big enough to meet the demand—and I've a hunch we can get the period shortened to six months. All the banks will scramble to swing the loan on your place. Most of their business will be farm loans, and first-year crops often aren't good. They'll consider you a sound risk."

"I like that," she laughed. "Sawyer Tyndall—risky but sound."

"Your bank will shovel out as many thousands of dollars as you need. You aren't aware of it, young lady, but the way I figured it, you're worth considerably more than fifty thousand."

"Fifty thousand is the most I can conceive of."

Foster took an envelope from an inner pocket. The back was scrawled with figures. "After I saw what lots were going for this morning, I did a little calculating—sort of mentally sub-dividing your farm into lots and blocks to see what its potentialities are." He studied the envelope. "Your quarter section of 160 acres runs a half mile in each direction. Figuring lots of 75 by 100 on two sides of a block, with a 14-foot alley, making eight lots per block with each block 100 yards long, would give you a total of 49 blocks, with a 65-foot street between each block, or a total of 392 lots. Now at \$400 a lot, which seems reasonable, on the average, the total value of the lots would be \$156,800."

"Why, that makes me three times as rich as I thought I was."

"Well, about twice as rich. You'll have to let one block go for school purposes, you'll probably want to give three or four lots for church sites, and perhaps donate a small park, and then you'll want a block or half a block for your own residence——"

"A whole block. Oh, I've already visualised my house sitting there—I know exactly what it's going to look like."

"Fine. So that you probably can figure on a net in the neighbourhood of \$100,000. Against that, I should think a bank would be willing to lend you up to three-fourths its value, or at least \$75,000, at eight to ten per cent."

"The first thing I want to do is repay what you've advanced me."

"A trifle. Now, what about your house?"

"The biggest house in town."

He smiled. "Wouldn't it be better just to build a comfortable-sized house and use the most of your money for investment, to run it into more?"

"But I don't know anything about business."

"If you wish, I'll keep an eye out for likely prospects and there'll be a good many. But you must watch out for sharpers. It might be a good rule not to do anything without consulting me. There are sharpers who wouldn't stop at trimming a young widow. Any kind of business deal can be tricky. Take what happened at the lot sale this morning. What a coup for sharpers that was!"

He chuckled, took out a fresh cigar, and bit off the end.

"Yes sir, quite a coup," he said expansively. "When the sale of business lots started, a saloon-keeper and a gambler bought lots in the two blocks at the south-east corner of the townsite. Then they let word out that they were going to build a huge saloon and dance hall and a big gambling casino. Values in the vicinity dropped to nothing. And the whole gambling and saloon crowd stepped in and snapped up both blocks for nickels. That was planned, you see, a neat plan. It all happened in twenty minutes and whoever framed it made a nice killing for himself. For you may be sure the vice folks were properly grateful for the idea. You may be sure." He lit the cigar and his voice became grave: "I mention this, Sawyer, only to show you that if sharpers got to working on you, you might lose your land in twenty minutes too."

"I won't ever do anything about business without consulting you first."

"Excellent. Well . . ." He waited, as if to say that if she had nothing else to see him about—

Sawyer rose. "I must be getting along. You have so much to do."

"Just going to hitch up and ride about the town site to talk to folks and see if I can be of help to anybody."

"You're so generous, Barney."

She was a block away before she realised that she would have supper alone.

After eating at an encampment restaurant operated by a buxom woman whose two daughters waited table, Sawyer stepped out into the twilight.

She wasn't ready to return to her tent. Well-fed, alive to her independence and freedom to do as she pleased, she decided to take a swing through the encampment and then up through the town to home.

There were fewer people in the streets at this hour. Through flap openings Sawyer could see men and sometimes families eating their

suppers, making up beds, and performing sundry domestic duties. A man carrying a three-legged stool and a pail of milk came round one tent; a cow was staked out behind. One by one the tents were lantern-lighted to translucent pyramids. She was attracted by a glow in the sky ahead. A noise of many voices and music began to rise. She continued walking, curious, in that direction.

She turned an angling corner and found herself entering a raucous concourse, packed with human beings and ablaze with high-hung lamps and flambeaux. It was a carnival scene.

What fun! she thought. Just like the state fair.

As she started up the way, she did not notice a crudely lettered street sign: Shanker Alley.

At first, it did seem like a street of sideshows at the fair. There were booths with spinning bicycle wheels and bright blankets as prizes for lucky numbers. There was a counter where men fished for celluloid goldfish floating in a narrow stream. At one place men were throwing baseballs at a darky's head. At another a gypsy woman was reading palms.

But she began to discover there was more to it than that. In rolled-up tents men crowded roulette tables, chuck-a-luck, faro banks, crap tables. Canvas flapped over brass-railed bars; the saloons were jammed. Here, men were throwing baseballs to try to trip into a tank of water a girl who, taunting them for their misses, reclined in a lacy chemise on a hinged ledge. Everywhere behind tripod stands snarling men dealt three-card monte or switched a pea under three shells. Before a gambling tent a steerer holding up two shearing fingers jeered, "Black sheep, black sheep, have you any wool?" On a bally stand a spieler pointed a cane at a yawning blonde draped in filmy veils and rasped, "The original Little Egypt, gents, straight from a triumphant tour after sensationalising the Keelumbia Expercision. She'll dance inside and she'll take 'em off, gents, she'll take 'em off." Occasionally, a drunk emptied his pistol at the stars.

The sweep of the crowd carried Sawyer past a canvas hall in which fancy-skirted girls danced with perspiring shirt-sleeved men. Half-running jumpy steps which Sawyer had never seen before, to music blared by a sweating Negro band armed with cornet, clarinet, saxophone, trombone, piano, and drums. Jaunty girls with fuddled companions reeled arm in arm up the street, singing, laughing, cursing those they bumped.

Sawyer swung on her heels to retrace her steps.

A hand crawled around her waist. "You a nice clean girl, kiddo?"

She did not glance at the face behind the sour breath. She broke free and plunged ahead and turned between two tents into the darkness

behind the row. She kicked into something yielding: a man lying prone bellowed, a woman under him cursed up at her. She murmured an "Excuse me" and went around them. But shadowy figures embraced everywhere back here; she had stumbled into an open-air rendezvous.

She reached the street again. A calliope close by blasted into action. Then she saw, not fifty feet away, Mr. Grossett, the circus owner, standing beside a ticket wagon. She started toward him. He turned and disappeared into the crowd.

Her eyes fell on a large orange-hued tent directly across the street, across its front a streamer: The Sulphur Nightingale and Red Hot Company.

Cecilia Trevaine had invited her to come and see her show. From her Sawyer could get an escort to help her out of this predicament.

She drew a long pin from her hat and pushed her way across. Better, she decided, to go to the rear, where the performers would be.

Picking her way among the guy ropes along the side of the tent, she passed from time to time rolled flaps. Through these openings she glimpsed on the stage a clown in motley—the typical Bard clown, able to identify passages from Shakespeare the audience might call out. This audience was exclusively male, seated on low benches.

"Stuff that dreams are made of!" one man shouted.

The clown extended his arms in despair. "Such ignorance." He roared: "We are such stuff as dreams are made *on*," my friend, "and our little life is rounded with a sleep." *The Tempest*, Act Four. Ask me something hard. Come, gentlemen, are you men of culture or not? Isn't there one among you brought up in genteel fashion, to know and revere the mighty Bard?"

"He lives in fame that died in virtue's cause."

The clown barked, "*Titus Andronicus*, Act One, ask me something hard." Waddling to the flickering footlight, he stuck out his tongue derisively.

The men had tired of him. "To hell with Shakespeare! Bring on the chickens!"

The clown cocked his head and held up waggling thumbs. "By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes. Open, locks, whoever knocks!" He somersaulted off.

In the pit a trombone soared gutturally, a drum snarled, a piano banged, and three unsmiling girls in striped bloomers, net stockings and Gainsborough hats danced out with hands on one another's shoulders.

Sawyer reached the rear of the tent. Cecilia was standing in the half-light offstage wearing a glittering knee-length skirt and décolleté blouse. Before Sawyer could call to her, Cecilia sauntered out into the lights.

When the boisterous greeting had fallen off she began to sing. The thick, husky words did not come clearly to Sawyer, but the song somehow involved Mary's having a little ram and later having a little lamb. The men whooped. Cecilia went off the other side, the three girls came out and danced, then Cecilia returned to sing again, this time protesting thickly that if she couldn't sell it, she was going to sit on it, she wasn't going to give it away, and it finally turned out she was talking about a rocking chair; and then she went out a rear opening and two baggy-pants comedians took the stage.

Sawyer hastened to the back of the tent. In the darkness she dimly saw Cecilia with an arm around one of the dancing girls and the two of them going to a small dressing tent. The dwarf Oof appeared in the illuminated opening.

"Sweetie-bunch and I are going to have a shot of brandy," said Cecilia. "Don't let anybody disturb us." The two women disappeared inside and the flap fell, throwing the dwarf guard into darkness.

Sawyer stood motionless, unable to decide what to do. The dwarf's eyes became accustomed to the starlight and he dimly saw her white dress. He waddled toward her. Sawyer couldn't stand up to his menacing approach. She turned and fled.

She did not know how far she had gone or in what direction except that she had kept the glow in the sky behind her, when she came out between two wall tents into a street. A man sat before one of the tents, his figure in the chair lighted by a lantern from within. He took a pipe from his mouth.

"Who's that?" he demanded querulously. "What're you doing there? You go on back there where you belong," he said indignantly. "You aren't wanted around here."

"No, please . . ."

He was an old man, with tousled grey hair, and though he had a grey stubble, plainly he was a respectable sort. She took a step into the light.

"Why . . . why, say there." He got to his feet. "You're Mrs. Tyndall, aren't you?"

"Yes. I was walking and somehow got turned around. Do you know where my home is?"

"Course I do. It's more than two miles almost. Won't take a minute to hitch the buggy."

"I don't mind walking."

"Maybe you don't, but I do. Come sit in the buggy while I hitch."

They made their way out of the encampment and into the town. It sparkled from the light of a thousand torches and lanterns. The feverish building was being continued into the night.

The old man couldn't restrain himself: "Young lady like you hadn't ought to be out by herself after dark."

Sawyer was peering ahead.

"I can take care of myself. Oh, there's my tent."

The old man waited at the opening until she had her lantern lighted. She thanked him and he drove away.

She laced the opening securely and turned to the interior and expelled a long breath of relief. Home! That was the thing. Always to have a home to return to.

As she put on her nightgown, she tried to separate and identify the noises outside. It was easy to recognise the hammering and sawing in the town; through it, occasionally, burst a snatch of music or bundle of cries from the rowdy district. Off to the north was a steady thum-thum-thum and savage shrieking. She remembered Limping Bear's Indian drums and Indian dancers. In her mind's eye she could see the half-naked Indians prancing round their staked victim while white spectators ringed the fire-lighted circle. She wondered how late they kept it up. In the grass outside the stridulations of locusts and katydids rose and fell. Scores of star-struck mules far and near trumpeted honh-hh! honh-hee! Somewhere a dog barked, another answered, then all the dogs in the world joined in.

Sleep seemed out of the question.

She got out a sheet of writing paper and a number of picture postcards of El Reno scenes which the photographer Roland Dince had given her the afternoon before. She stood at the bureau, using it as a writing desk. On one card, showing the lottery platform at the moment Foster introduced her to the crowd, she drew an arrow to herself and lettered ME above it. Then, after a moment of thought, clicking the fountain pen against her teeth, she began to write:

Dear Martha: So much has happened that I know you're dying to hear about I hardly know where to begin. Sadness and grief have come to me, but excitement and good fortune too. Wouldn't you like me to relate some of it? To-day I . . .

The fountain pen stopped. Her slender fingers held it fixed against the paper until the seeping ink spread to a blot. Slowly, she screwed on the cap and wadded the paper into a ball and tossed it aside. The postcards she returned to a top drawer.

The impulse to write Martha had subsided before a realisation that she could write a dozen pages and still would not have revealed in a way Martha could understand what had really happened to her. Even as she began writing, she had thought of herself as a woman writing

condescendingly to a girl. She had left Martha—the innocence Martha represented—far behind. Sawyer, herself, was . . .

She looked into the mirror. Not long ago her face had been pale, her eyes wide with bewilderment. Now her complexion was brown above the white-throated nightgown and in her grey eyes there was a knowing.

She gazed deeply into the mirrored eyes scrutinising hers. Suddenly, she asked quietly: “But just who *are* you?”

The red lips of the image closed on the question, its smooth brow frowned, perplexed, but the steady eyes gave no answer. The two faces still gazing, each blew out her lantern; and the one vanished, but the other remained in the darkness.

She lay on the fresh sheets and stared up into the noise-filled dark. From far off she heard the blatant notes of the calliope, a distant pistol fired repeatedly, then another burst of shot. Sawyer shuddered. That frightening district. Why should it be here to mar the beginning? She hadn’t foreseen an evil flourishing like a weed in the fair new land. The district somehow reminded her of Tony, whom she thought she had escaped forever. Or was it prudish, even childish, to expect absolute perfection of the new town? Perfection in what? Frowning, Sawyer turned on her side and drew up her knees.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

AS Barney Foster had prophesied, all banks were eager to make the loan on her land. Foster took time to examine the credentials and charters of the various banks for her, but Sawyer made the decision to give the mortgage to the South-western National, of which the two jolly, bald brothers, John V. and Thomas H. Thurston, were president and vice-president, respectively. She chose them because their ownership of the town's only horseless carriage suggested that they were progressive and modern. The bankers opened an account against which she could draw up to \$81,000, and helped find a builder for her house.

The first time the builder, a Mr. Collins, came to call at her tent, Sawyer had difficulty getting him to understand exactly the kind of house she wanted. They pored through catalogues, sample floor plans, and pictures of houses which he brought, and though they readily came to an agreement on the general plan of the interior, none of the pictures showed just the exterior effect she wanted. "There!" she would exclaim, pointing to a mid-Victorian house dripping with milled gewgawry, "that's almost it—but it's not fancy enough. It's got to be fancy." When Mr. Collins asked to explain precisely what she meant by "fancy," she said thoughtfully, "Well—looking light as air, for one thing. Not heavy and plain. It's got to be the kind of house I'd *dream* of having. Like a Spanish castle on a billowing cloud, the kind Maxfield Parrish paints so wonderfully—oh, not *like* a Spanish castle, of course, but having that *feeling*. You do see, don't you?" Mr. Collins confessed that he didn't. "Well, I mean with lots and lots of cut-out scroll work along the eaves and under the bay windows, lots of lattice work all round, and a very fancy kind of railing on the front porch. And the roof mustn't be just an ordinary roof—it must have lots of angles, and wavy shingles, and little minarets and spires with fancy lightning rods. And the walls, a narrow clapboard—the walls mustn't be straight and ordinary, they have to make little turns unexpectedly. And I want it painted yellow with the scroll-work brown—maybe—I don't know yet. What I mean, Mr. Collins—I *don't* understand why you can't see it—it must be the kind of house that when people drive by and look at it, they won't just say, well, there's a house where somebody lives. It must excite their admiration—they must say, that beautiful structure is the residence of the famous Sawyer Tyndall—how coveted is an invitation to enter that elegant front door!" Suddenly realising that her enthusiasm had carried her into immodesty, she blushed and lowered her eyes. Mr.

Collins rubbed his unshaven chin. "I think I gotcha," he said. "You want it fancy."

Once he had drawn plans that met Sawyer's approval, Mr. Collins turned out to be fast and competent. He employed an unusually large crew of carpenters, and began putting up a central section first, so that Sawyer might move into a part of the house as soon as possible. This section embraced a large front parlour, small back parlour, a sewing room, and the main hall, whose stairs led up to her main bedroom and another bedroom. As this central part began to take shape, foundations were laid for the right wing, where there would be a library, guest room, and bath. Pending construction of the dining room, kitchen, and pantries in the left wing, Sawyer would continue to eat her meals in her tent. Behind the tent by this time stood the skin tepee of the Indian woman, Falling Leaf, whom Sawyer had employed as cook and maidservant.

Sawyer watched the house rise with fascinated eyes. Sitting on a sawhorse or keg of nails, she would jot down new ideas to submit to Mr. Collins. The patient man assured her each time that the changes she suggested would slow the work not at all—or at least, very little. Only on occasions when she suggested changing a change did he show a hint of exasperation; a smile or a pat on the arm restored his good humour . . . Sundays, she would sit well back in her tent and observe people who drove out to see what progress had been made during the week. When she could no longer bear to watch their gestures without knowing what they were saying, she would casually stroll over and let them direct their compliments to her.

She quickly discovered that the local stores were not stocked with the quality of furnishings her house demanded, so, early in September, she took her floor plans and went by rail to Kansas City. The interior decorator she found, a Rudolph Bessing, happened to be a Morris disciple in rebellion against Victorian hideousness, but she would have none of his Morris furniture—much too simple and *plain*! When he discovered that, although she had ample funds, Sawyer could express what she wanted only in vague generalities, the cheery, balding man talked at length with her in his office, searching for clues to her personality. At one point in the conversation, he casually asked her age, to which Sawyer promptly replied, "Twenty-one. Why!" she said, "as a matter of fact this is my birthday!" As a matter of fact it was; she was eighteen years old. "We must celebrate," said Bessing, "with dinner at the Muhlbach to-night." She had only three hours to go out and buy a dinner gown, and at dinner Bessing toasted her twenty-one years and told her she was the most charming young woman he had ever

known. After her fourth glass of champagne, Sawyer discovered for herself how truly witty and charming she was.

"I'm beginning to wonder if this isn't what we're after," said Bessing over the coffee. "We want to delight the eye of the beholder—make him envious—perhaps—?"

"Well," said Sawyer, "not necessarily *envious* . . ."

"And we want to surround ourselves with colour and furniture which will assure us that all is well. Right?"

"I—guess so."

"For example, the parlour. Suppose it were furnished with Directoire pieces, black trimmed with gilt, upholstery in stripes or dots, set on thick carpeting of rich pattern. The walls you would have done a glowing red." Shrewdly, he watched Sawyer's grey eyes widen. "On these red walls we would hang two or three pictures of European scenes, framed massively in off-white. A pedestal or two with a marble cherub or Grecian bust. The piano, I gather, is your foremost accomplishment, so we would place a grand piano in such a way as to command recognition of this talent. To suggest your being widely travelled, we would have a Chinese screen or two. In the doorway leading to the back parlour we would hang a Chinese wind chime. And then—Does this appeal to you?"

Sawyer clasped her hands to her breast. "Oh yes!"

"In all this we would be seeking to emphasise your sophistication."

Sawyer dropped her hands to her lap and deliberately arched an eyebrow. "For the most part," she said casually, "it's very much like what I had in mind all along."

"I see. Well, then, the rest should be easy for us."

The next three days Sawyer had a gay time pouring over photographs and tramping the city with Bessing, selecting articles and materials for the entire house. She accepted his judgment on all things, except that she definitely knew the bed she wanted for her own—a maple one as much like her mother's as possible. From her description, he turned up a photograph of a canopy bed which looked much like it. "Queen Anne," he said. "We can do your entire bedroom in Queen Anne maple, though we should do things with ruffles and draperies to heighten a harmony with your extreme femininity . . ."

While waiting for her train in the Kansas City station next day, Sawyer had an impulse to revisit the room where she and Tony had stayed for two days before boarding the Lottery Special. She found it after a short walk in a dirty neighbourhood. The suspicious landlady, who did not remember her, was surprised to see a smartly dressed young woman at her doors, but Sawyer gave her a dollar, explaining she had once occupied the room. She did not enter the room: she

only stood in the doorway and surveyed the sagging brass bed, the cracked chamberpot, the holes in the rug, the shade twisted askew, the filthy walls. She shuddered and turned away. On the way back to the station, she whispered, "Never, never, Sawyer. Never let anything force you back to that . . ."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

WHEN Sawyer got home, she was impatient to move into the central part of her house, but, though it had reached the point where plasterers were finishing the walls of that section, still she would have to live in the tent a while longer. She returned to it reluctantly; the adventure had gone out of it; it was a primitive shelter. The depression which unaccountably set in the moment she stepped from the train and entered the noisy town of unfinished frame buildings and dirty canvas was deepened by word from her father.

There were a good many letters waiting on her return, though the proposals and requests for money from people she had never heard of had slackened steadily, but among the letters she found one from Amos Bolton. She recognised his hand and opened the envelope with mixed emotions. The contents astonished her. He had come to the conclusion that he had been wrong to condemn her for her marriage, though apparently it had turned out just about as he, with a father's solicitous foresight, had feared. But he could not resist rejoicing for her good fortune, about which he had read. He found it very lonesome in the old house alone, he no longer took much interest in business affairs, and his thoughts turned often to his beloved daughter. He would never permit himself to be a burden on her, but surely, young and inexperienced as she was, she needed parental guidance to keep her on a safe course. Though it would be an inconvenience to him, if she needed him and wished his company, he would be only too happy to come and live with her . . .

The first time she read it through Sawyer was touched; but as she re-read it carefully, it was as if she heard him speaking the words, with the timid leer she had once so detested, and she saw with what cunning, so familiar to her through tormented years, he had couched his words. He wanted to be near so he could re-exercise his tyrannical control; moreover, she could see his small hand, which had grasped money so fiercely all his life, slyly reaching for hers. The contempt which curled her lip came easily.

At first she thought not even to answer the letter. But the picture of herself in the role of ungrateful daughter—though what had she to be grateful for? she asked—troubled her conscience. Besides she could get satisfaction from a magnanimous gesture. She wrote her answer with the care she was aware he had used: she regretted to learn that his business affairs were not going well, and while the style of living to which she had grown accustomed required considerable expenditures

of money, nevertheless as one who, as his letter stated, was his daughter, she felt a sense of duty she was prepared to meet. If he would state specifically a sum he needed, she would be only too happy to make him a gift of it. As for his coming to live with her, she was afraid he would not find it pleasant. She was no longer, as he seemed to think, inexperienced, and while she lived a respectable life, none the less the freedom of living alone as she did permitted conduct which would probably distress him. However, if he was lonely and felt the need of corresponding with someone, she would be glad to answer promptly any letters he might write.

She was about to hand it to the postman next morning when she noticed in the mail he held out for her a Raleigh postmark. She kept her letter, and re-entering her tent, tore open the Raleigh one. It was from a firm of lawyers. Regretfully, they informed her of her father's death of a stroke. He had died alone, in debt, and such funds of his as the lawyers had been able to find had been sufficient only to meet burial expenses. With commiseration in your deep sorrow, etc. . . .

Shocked by the unexpectedness of it, Sawyer sat on the edge of her bed and stared at the letter. ". . . In your deep sorrow." She must feel sorrow. He hadn't truly despised her; he had been a pathetic, bumbling old man. Emotion welled in her, but no tears came. For it was not—she couldn't help it—honestly a sorrow that he was no longer living; it was a sorrow for herself, a girl who now was completely without family. ". . . Living alone as I do," she had written. Now she lived alone not only in this tent; she lived alone in the world. The emotion the thought aroused was so poignant that she stretched out on the bed to let it engulf her, the letter dropping to the floor, and she was vexed when Falling Leaf shuffled in to remind her that they needed groceries.

She was still caught in the mood of self-pity when, walking into town for marketing, she met Allen Dunbar driving out in a hack.

"I was on my way to your place," he said, jumping down beside her.

"I'm walking," said Sawyer, "only because the carriage I purchased in Kansas City hasn't arrived."

"I hope it comes soon. Let me give you a lift." She stepped in over luggage. "I was coming to say goodbye," he said.

"Goodbye?"

"I'm leaving."

"Oh, no, Allen. So soon?"

"It's been two months." He sat beside her and the driver turned the hack. "I didn't want to go without asking if you had a message for Martha."

"You mean you're leaving this afternoon?"

"Yes: on the three o'clock."

"Oh. Well, give Martha my love."

"I shall."

"I'm sure she and her mother are pleased that the hoyden is now known as queen of the Kiowa-Comanche country. So exotic."

He hesitated. "I'm sure they're pleased by your luck."

"Undoubtedly. I saw in the paper recently that your mother and your sister Lucy had arrived."

"George has built a temporary three-room house on his farm—it's about nine miles out—and he and Lucy will move there next week. Mother——"

"I must find time to call on your mother," she said without interest. "Old timer welcoming the newcomer. How is your father's business?"

"Splendid. I've never seen him so happy."

"He's a dear, I've learned," she said disconsolately, "while having him help select my hardware fixtures."

"Sawyer," said Allen hesitantly. "Is there anything wrong. You sound upset."

"I've just learned that my father has died."

"No! I'm so sorry."

She lowered her head. "I wasn't a very good daughter to him," she said remorsefully.

"You mustn't, Sawyer," said Allen. "You were a good daughter—you couldn't help being." She lifted her head bravely. "I wish there were something I could say to ease your grief."

"You're kind," said Sawyer, "but—oh—it's just that I feel so by myself. And then, on top of everything else, you're leaving. It just hadn't occurred to me that *anybody* would be leaving, now that we're all here. And you know, I've thought of it, it's queer—every time there has been a crisis in my life these last few months—well, you've somehow been there. And I'm sure some of it was no more pleasant for you to see than it was for me to endure."

"I wish I could have helped more."

"I didn't need any help," said Sawyer quickly. "But—well, we've been seeing each other on the street, and saying hello, and it's been meeting somebody I've known the longest of anybody here, and now—Oh, that's selfish of me. I know you're eager to get back to civilisation and all——"

"I'll miss seeing you, too, Sawyer. Very much," he added. "But—well, I'll finally be working again—just as I've been seeing everybody around me here working—which will be a change to be applauded. The Judge writes there's a big lawsuit of some kind being prepared I'll enjoy being in on."

"And then there'll be Martha to see. I know you've missed her."

"I've already been gone longer than I promised her I'd be. But, aside from that, Sawyer—and this is something I shouldn't have dreamed I'd one day be saying—in a way I'm reluctant to go."

"You are?" She looked at him curiously.

"Well——"

"I can't imagine why anybody would be reluctant to leave here."

Her scowl made him laugh. "Say, that's quite a new opinion, isn't it? Until to-day I didn't know anybody as enthusiastic as you've been about it."

"Well, I was. And probably to-morrow I shall be again. But when I got home the other day—oh, maybe it was a natural letdown after the exciting time I had in Kansas City, but suddenly everything looked so shoddy and cheap and dusty——"

"Give it time, Sawyer. Look how much has been accomplished in two months. There won't be any dust when the streets are paved, and there hasn't been time to finish anything but the flimsier frame buildings."

"But the way they're going about it. Is it going to be beautiful—is it going to be *different*? Or is it going to be just like every other town that ever was?" The hack had reached the business district, and the driver slowed the horse in the haphazard traffic of the busy street. "Look at it," she said irritably.

"What did you expect?"

"I don't *know*. But everybody was talking about a new chance, and how they were going to be different, and so far as I can tell, they're just the same old people. Haven't they brought everything they were with them?"

"That's true," said Allen. "It would have to be true. But there's more—hope revived, for one thing. There are some very fine people here. Perhaps you haven't had time to get widely enough acquainted."

"I've been so busy with my house——"

"Sure. But, for example, Mother was asking me about you the other day, and I told her I thought it would be nice if she invited you to join some of her clubs—she wants to very much. That's the first thing the women set about doing, you know, organising all kinds of music clubs, and poetry, and garden clubs—they provide the easiest medium for ladies to get acquainted. And Mother has always been a perfect terror of a club woman—I think her proudest accomplishment," he smiled, "was the vice-presidency of the Pennsylvania Federated Women's Clubs."

"Oh, I know all about the clubs," said Sawyer. "I've been thinking of joining one or two, possibly. As a matter of fact, some ladies who drove out to look at my house the other day invited me to join one of theirs."

"Why didn't you?"

"Oh, I don't know. I probably shall."

She couldn't tell him that after talking with the ladies she had been struck by the thought that she might have manoeuvred the conversation to a point where they practically were forced to invite her. She hadn't questioned their sincerity at the time, but afterward, she wondered if there hadn't been inflections of reluctance and insincerity in their voices despite the extravagant insistence on how much they would love having her. The doubt had made it impossible for her to go to their meeting; she knew she would sit sick with fear that they had talked maliciously about her before she came, and would resume doing so when she left . . .

"Well, Allen," she said, "I really like the town, and I wouldn't think of living anywhere else. But you're the last person I expected to hear defending it."

"I confess I thought this was to be a mecca for people out to get something for nothing. A free for all—a spin on a wheel. But my record for being wrong is still practically perfect. There's something about creating—building—that's inspiring, isn't it?"

"Building my house has been enormously satisfying," admitted Sawyer. "I almost dread finishing it."

The hack was halted by a traffic tangle. "Oh," said Allen, "I suppose you want to get down along here somewhere?"

"Well——" said Sawyer, "I've been giving you such a gloomy send-off," She smiled. "I'll ride all the way to the station with you—and promise to be more cheerful."

"Fine!" He looked at his watch, then surveyed the street. "See that newspaper office over there? The *Sentinel*. Dick Robinson is editor. Do you know him?"

"No. What's he like?"

"Dick? Oh, twenty-nine or thirty. Black-haired. Went to Michigan. Talks fast—wide-awake, hustling sort. Well, Dick and Pen Pendleton—Pen's another good egg, full of jokes, we three have been rabbit hunting a few times—and they're looking forward to duck hunting on the river this winter, darn 'em—we found a good place to build blinds—and they got up a Friday night penny ante game I've been holding a hand in. They've already got a Commerce Club started, a number of these fellows have, and an Elks' lodge, and they're full of plans for all kinds of community enterprises and organisations. All I've been doing is sitting and twiddling my thumbs and listening—completely out of it. Over there—you remember Roland Dince, the photographer?"

"Oh, yes."

"That's his studio. He's decided to stay. He's got a stuffed buffalo

and an Indian tepee—he'll take your picture sitting on the buffalo or smoking a peace pipe in front of the tepee. He knows some astounding tales; I've loafed around in his place quite a bit. And down the side street—see that little chili parlour? Red Holt, from Texas, runs it—he served in the Philippines. He's introduced me to four or five other fellows who served out there. We've got a special table in Red's place where we have lunch and talk over the Philippine campaigns and politics. Over that jewellery store is Doc Rogers' office—he's a young dentist—smart as a whip——”

“You *have* made a lot of friends,” said Sawyer. She liked the enthusiasm lighting his face. For once his manner was not guarded. He had become almost wistfully boyish.

“Why don't you stay, Allen?”

“I'm afraid it wouldn't work out agreeably,” he said. They had reached the depot. He jumped down, then helped her down, and indicated his luggage to the driver. “Martha is right,” he said.

“Martha?”

“I sort of wondered in a letter to her whether it might not be a bad idea for us to live out here.” He grinned ruefully. “She's right, though. It would be hard for me to justify trying to start a practice from scratch when I have a very good one waiting. I suppose it would.”

“And,” said Sawyer, as they went around the demounted mail car serving as a temporary depot, “I doubt that Martha is the pioneer type.”

“Oh, I think she would manage as well as anyone——”

“Of course, so do I!” What a tactless remark, she reproved herself. She waited until Allen had paid the driver. “What I meant was, in these modern times I suppose it's all right for the wife to decide where she and her husband will live.” Oh dear, that was even worse—and he hadn't liked it; she could tell by the stiffish way he went to the window to get his ticket.

But, before he returned to her, he put two pennies in a vending machine on the depot wall and brought back two chocolate bars.

Accepting one, Sawyer said, “Isn't your family coming to see you off?”

“I asked them not to. Hand-wringing, smothering the departing one with kisses. Besides, Mother always weeps even if I'm just going to be gone overnight—heaven knows how she would carry on to-day!”

“Do you mean I'm the last person you came to tell goodbye?”

“I was so busy until the last minute, that was the reason——”

“You're fibbing, Allen Dunbar,” she said mischievously. “You saved me till last because you're head over heels in love with me, and you know it.”

He stared at her and a crimson flush crept up from his collar and suffused his face.

"Why, Allen!" said Sawyer in astonishment. "I was only joking! I only wanted to make up for being so gloomy by sending you off in a gale of laughter!" She couldn't help laughing herself at the sight of his face.

"I know I'm blushing," he stammered.

"You're red as a beet! I've shocked you by being so bold!"

"No, you haven't," he protested. "You just caught me by surprise." He laughed too. "Nobody ever said anything like that to me before."

"I take it all back," she said broadly, like a child. "We'll just be friends."

Good for you, Sawyer, she told herself. You actually broke through that imperturbable young gentleman's poise for once and embarrassed him as much as he has more than once embarrassed you. Why, she thought with surprise, if you just hit him directly enough, he's no more able to conceal his confusion than you are . . . The pleasure it gave her to have thrown him off balance was so satisfying that she wished she could think of something else audacious to say to shock him. After all, he was leaving, and she didn't have to be afraid of a frown of his now . . .

But nothing apropos occurred to her, and, as they munched their chocolate and stood beside the waiting two-coach train, they continued their conversation in the way that becomes increasingly desultory as the time for departure grows nearer but never seems quite to arrive. In the depot the telegraph sounder clicked spasmodically. At a siding up the track a line of farm wagons led to a string of boxcars where sacks of seed wheat were being unloaded.

At last the conductor standing beside the rear coach steps, turnip watch in hand, waved to the fireman. "Board!" he warned.

"Well . . ." said Allen, with relief, and with equal relief she held out her hand: "Goodbye, Allen. And good luck."

As their hands parted, she felt forsaken. In her mind's eye flashed images of the cities of the East, the established, orderly cities where life was settled and continuously even and gracious. That, just now, seemed to be the desirable world, and it began at the far edge of the prairie beyond the horizon. She was being left behind. Deserted. Her eyes misted, and she lowered her head . . .

"Here comes Tad as fast as his legs will carry him," Allen was saying. "I guess he had to tell me goodbye once more."

. . . What bad luck that Allen should leave just as they had been able to talk easily, like friends, for the first time. But as much as his going—it was the damn train itself going off and leaving her standing alone on this prairie . . .

"Allen! Don't get on. Wait!"

"Tad! What's wrong? Catch your breath and tell me."

Sawyer came out of her reverie to listen to the panting boy.

"Fremont! He's been stabbed!"

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

WHEN Sawyer, with Allen and Tad, arrived at the Dunbar house in a hack, she was introduced by Allen to his sister Lucy, who met them at the door. Sawyer asked Lucy Potter what she could do to help, and Lucy, who was pregnant and rather sullen at the moment, suggested she might stir the white cloths boiling on the kitchen stove. As she went to the kitchen, Sawyer had only a glimpse of Fremont, lying on a bed specially set up in the newly plastered and still unfurnished dining room: he was whimpering as Dr. Smithinson dressed his shoulder wound. While stirring the cloths and also tending a chicken broth, Sawyer could not help overhearing the substance of a conversation between Allen and Fremont in the dining room, as well as hearing a murmur of voices, coming from an adjoining room, which she gathered to be those of Mr. and Mrs. Dunbar and Lucy.

"... And he wasn't very tall," Fremont was saying. "In shirt-sleeves, with yellow sleeve-holders . . . and I remember he had a red-beaded watchfob, his hair was whitish yellow, and he needed a shave."

"Did the place have a name?" asked Allen.

"Maybe the Kill-Kare Kasino—all spelled with a K. It might not have been that one—I had been in several——"

Tad had explained breathlessly as they rode out from the depot how Fremont got hurt. With the eight dollars his father had paid him for a week's work in his pocket, Fremont decided to explore a few of the gambling hells. In one he placed a dollar bet with a three-card monte dealer, giving the dealer, he said, a five-dollar bill. But when he asked for his change, the dealer claimed it had been only a one. Fremont protested, there was an exchange of words, and the dealer drew a knife and struck Fremont high in the shoulder . . .

There was a moment's silence in the dining room, then Allen strode through the kitchen. He went out the back door without a glance at Sawyer. She saw that his face was pale with anger. He entered one of two tents in the backyard, which Sawyer assumed were used by the family for sleeping quarters, and presently re-emerged with a saddle and bridle. He saddled his pony, tethered at the rear of the lot, and rode down the alley.

Now that the dining room was quiet, except for an occasional reassuring word given Fremont by Dr. Smithinson, Sawyer could hear more clearly the conversation in the other room. She listened unashamedly, for she was anxious to get an impression of the kind of woman Mrs. Dunbar might be before meeting her face to face.

"... Well, why don't we dismiss the whole affair by saying it was an accident?" Lucy was saying impatiently.

"Accident!" boomed Overton Dunbar. "Nothing accidental about it. The boy got in a fight and got licked. Taught him a lesson, I hope. I've always said that the only way to raise a son is to let him learn in the school of hard knocks."

"You weren't talking this way thirty minutes ago when we thought Fremont might be dying."

That undoubtedly was Mrs. Dunbar's voice. At the first sound of it Sawyer thought of Mrs. McCrae's voice. Mrs. Dunbar's had the same austere, cool, well modulated quality. One could tell from the similarity of the voices that the two women had much in common to make them close friends: they both spoke, thought Sawyer, having Mrs. Dunbar's club activities in mind, in the precise tones of a well-corseted lady reading her annual paper on the planting and care of spring bulbs. The recollection of Mrs. McCrae, particularly of the haughty erectness with which she had sat as she heard of Sawyer's elopement, inspired Sawyer with a sudden dread of meeting Mrs. Dunbar.

The conversation continued.

"Well, we know now that Fremont's all right," Dunbar was saying. "It's one more thing to teach him what's good for him and what's not. I'd wager that Fremont learned more to-day than your precious Allen learned in all his years at Harvard."

"At least," said Mrs. Dunbar defensively, "Allen wouldn't have been in one of those horrible gambling places and neither would Fremont if you'd only exercise discipline, Overton, the way we used to."

"No sir!" agreed Dunbar. "Allen wouldn't have been there. Where was Allen? Why, on his way to fulfil the convenient contract arranged by two mothers for their precious offspring. On his way to reclining at ease on the McCraes' moneybags."

Good for you! said Sawyer to herself.

"Overton," implored Mrs. Dunbar, and it was astonishing, thought Sawyer, how she could convey extreme displeasure without altering the calm modulation of her voice, "it hardly seems fair to attack a mother's solicitude for her son's happiness. I do wish you wouldn't so readily take on the uncouth directness of this country. Sometimes I hardly recognise you any more——"

"Vigour, my dear. I've got rid of the dry rot which infested me and destroyed the firm handed me on a silver platter—just as you're trying to hand Allen a life he hasn't earned himself. Oh," he said, and Sawyer could almost see him throwing up his hands, "I won't protest! I learned long ago not to interfere in any scheme you might have for Allen." And he laughed genially, for which Sawyer was glad; the approach to

a family quarrel was becoming embarrassing for her to eavesdrop.

"We needn't raise our voices so," said Mrs. Dunbar, her own gradually lowering, "especially since Lucy tells me . . ."

Sawyer gasped. Had she understood correctly the barely audible last few words of Mrs. Dunbar's sentence? Had she said, ". . . since Lucy tells me that that Sawyer Tyndall is in the house?" *That* Sawyer Tyndall? Oh, surely not. She *couldn't* have. Perhaps she hadn't used two "that's;" she *must* have just said, ". . . Lucy tells me that Sawyer Tyndall is——"

They were coming toward the kitchen . . .

In her confusion Sawyer blindly turned to a dishpan stacked with dirty dishes. As Mrs. Dunbar, entering the kitchen first, spoke, Sawyer straightened her shoulders and turned with her most gracious smile.

"Oh, Mrs. Tyndall!" protested Mrs. Dunbar. "It is Mrs. Tyndall, isn't it? You mustn't do those dishes. My servant girl's ill to-day—of all days to pick—and I simply didn't have a chance to do them myself in all the excitement."

"I really don't know much about dish washing," said Sawyer apologetically, "but I came to help out—and they're no trouble."

"I'll dry 'em for you!" said Overton Dunbar. Oh dear, thought Sawyer, now I *will* have to wash her old dirty dishes. But she smiled and nodded agreement.

"Well," Dunbar asked his wife, "what do you think of Mrs. Tyndall? Didn't I tell you she's pretty as a picture?"

"Oh, please," said Sawyer.

"Every bit as lovely as I've been told," said Mrs. Dunbar pleasantly. "I've heard so many things about you, dear, from my husband and Allen and from—well, everybody."

Who were everybody? wondered Sawyer. The McCraes? She smiled sweetly. "And if I may say so, Mrs. Dunbar, you're just as beautiful as Allen told me his mother was."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Dunbar. "Although," she said, smoothing her faultless blue serge skirt over her hips, "I might have been more presentable for a call."

"Look at me," said Sawyer, depreciating her own white wool suit. "I just threw this on to go to market—and happened to meet Allen."

"Lucy," said Mr. Dunbar, "get Mrs. Tyndall an apron so she won't ruin her lovely suit."

Dr. Smithinson appeared in the doorway to announce that Fremont was resting easily, out of danger, and that he would call again in the evening. Lucy, having tied an apron on Sawyer, moodily waddled out to show the doctor to the front door. As Sawyer and Overton Dunbar started on the dishes, Mrs. Dunbar ladled a bowl of chicken broth.

"I suppose a thing such as happened to Fremont would be a disgrace to the family in Philadelphia," she said, "but here it has a kind of naturalness, hasn't it?" She took the broth in to Fremont.

Having passed the crisis of meeting Mrs. Dunbar, Sawyer was able, by stealing covert glances through the dining room doorway, to size up her physical appearance. She was shorter and of slighter build than Sawyer had imagined—Sawyer had assumed that she would be big and bosomy like Mrs. McCrae—and she had supposed Mrs. Dunbar would have grey hair. But there was no grey in her chestnut hair, only the faintest of lines on her proud forehead, and she had the same hazel eyes and fine nose as Allen. Unlike Allen, however, Mrs. Dunbar's mouth was soft and small, and her chin came to a delicate point. She had been kind and pleasant, but something in her manner—the quick, almost snappish blinking of her eyes, the apparent strength of her narrow, blue-veined hands—suggested to Sawyer that she could be a formidable opponent to anyone she disliked.

Mrs. Dunbar returned hastily from the dining room. "Have you seen Allen?"

"He rode off on his horse," said Sawyer, gingerly handing Dunbar a rinsed dish.

"Oh, no!" said Mrs. Dunbar, distressed. "Overton, Fremont thinks Allen has gone to try and find the man who hurt him."

"Allen?" said Dunbar dubiously.

"You must go after him," said Mrs. Dunbar firmly.

"Why?"

"Those horrible people—they might do something to him."

"He's pretty good at taking care of himself."

"But, Overton—he's wearing his best suit!"

Dunbar laughed heartily. "Ethel, Ethel," he said, "when will you let that boy show his manhood?"

Mrs. Dunbar's lips tightened. "I'll be glad when you get over being an anarchist. I'm going to send George."

How abruptly Mrs. Dunbar's manner had changed, thought Sawyer. She had shown a deep maternal anxiety for Fremont's welfare, but when Allen appeared to be in danger, she became more than anxious—she became fierce.

George, called from the parlour, nodded a greeting to Sawyer. He had been painting, and his overalls and face were smeared with paint.

Dunbar sighed. "Hitch up the surrey, George, and see if you can find Allen for his mother. She thinks you'll find him stalking the gambling hells on vengeance bent. Tell him to be a good boy and come home."

"Tell him," said Mrs. Dunbar, "he simply mustn't become involved with those people."

After George had gone, Sawyer mentioned she really should go home, but first she asked if she might see Fremont, and he opened his eyes and stared at her with piteous gratitude when she assured him that she had, indeed, come just to see him. Then, when she had collected her gloves and pocket-book, it developed that, with the surrey gone, there was no conveyance in which to take her home. Sawyer protested prettily that she could walk, but she managed her inflection in such a way that Overton Dunbar exclaimed he wouldn't think of letting her walk that far. "Why don't you stay for supper?" he said. "You must!"

"Why——" Sawyer glanced at Mrs. Dunbar.

"Of course, dear," said Mrs. Dunbar. "We'd love having you."

"But to-day—with everything——"

"Nonsense. We won't have much, I'm afraid, but you've been such a help——"

She did want to stay. For one thing, except that she dined twice a week with Barney, she had been eating meal after meal alone. More, Allen's dashing off to avenge his brother was terribly exciting; she *had* to be on hand to learn how it all came out.

She agreed to stay on condition that she be permitted to help prepare the supper.

Mrs. Dunbar's anxiety over Allen's absence reached a point where she burnt herself at the stove, dropped a plate while setting the dining table, which was temporarily placed on the back porch, and finally Lucy and Sawyer shooed her from the kitchen.

George returned to report he hadn't been able to find Allen. Mrs. Dunbar was dismayed, and Sawyer herself felt a sudden uneasiness. George did have news, though. The stabbing of a boy had aroused a mob of men who had lost money in the gambling houses to take a revenge for their losses. Two or three gamblers had been beaten and a couple of tents torn down when six mounted U.S. marshals rode up with drawn guns and put a stop to it. The chief marshal explained to the mob that there was no federal law against such places and that until the town was organised and had passed whatever laws it pleased, the marshals would have to protect those establishments against violence with the same degree of vigilance they would use to safeguard a grocery or a bank. The mob broke up; the members of it, such as had money, repairing to the bars to have a drink on it, or to the chuck-a-luck tables to try to get even in a quieter fashion.

"As soon as you've eaten, George," said Mrs. Dunbar, "you'll have to go back and search for him again. And Overton, if you don't feel like going, I'm going myself."

"Very well, Ethel," said Dunbar, "I'll go."

The family was sitting down to table on the back porch when Allen

rode around the house and dismounted. Mrs. Dunbar was on her feet instantly.

"Allen," she said. "Where in the world have you been?"

"Well," said Overton Dunbar, as Allen came up on the porch, "did you pummel him with your fists, plug him with your trusty thirty-eight, or draw, quarter, and boil him in oil?"

"I didn't find him," said Allen. He went into the kitchen and washed his hands and combed his hair, then returned and sat beside Sawyer. He smiled and started to say something to her when Mrs. Dunbar asked again, "Why were you gone so long, Allen? Were you in that awful mob?"

"No. I've been at Dick Robinson's office."

"I do hope you can keep the story of Fremont's misfortune out of the paper."

"We weren't talking about that." He turned to Sawyer. "Glad you could stay to supper. You and Mother have been talking about clubs, I imagine."

"No, we haven't."

"We've had other things on our minds, Allen," said Mrs. Dunbar.

"Sawyer tells me she was considering joining one or two," he continued. "I think if you prevailed on her to go into a couple of yours, she would have something worthwhile to contribute. Don't you?"

"I know Mrs. Tyndall would," said Mrs. Dunbar. "I was really surprised not to find you active already, dear."

"I've been so busy——"

"If Sawyer can find time," said Allen, "why don't you have her visit one this week?"

"Of course," said Mrs. Dunbar. "I'll tell you—the Over-the-Tea-cups Club meets Tuesday. I'll—let me pick you up at three."

"I think I'll be free Tuesday," said Sawyer with what she hoped was exactly the correct amount of polite interest. "I'd be delighted."

"All right, all right," said Dunbar impatiently to Allen. "Don't be a man of mystery. What *were* you talking about with young Robinson?"

Allen broke a piece of bread and buttered it. "We were drawing up some placards and planning the editorials."

"For what?"

"Dick's going to support me."

"Dod blast it, for what?" boomed Dunbar.

"For city attorney," said Allen quietly. "I'm going to run for it."

"Allen!" exclaimed Mrs. Dunbar.

The family stared at him. Allen said, "May I have the potatoes, please?"

"But Allen," protested Mrs. Dunbar, "you can't!"

"Why can't I?"

"You're on your way to Washington. Now that we know Fremont will be all right, there's no reason why you shouldn't take to-morrow's train."

"I won't be on it, Mother."

Mrs. Dunbar was speechless.

"Just what," asked Overton Dunbar, "brought you to this decision?"

"I don't like what happened to Fremont."

"Neither do any of us."

"And I didn't like what I saw down in that district this afternoon."

"And what did you see?"

"I think we all know what's going on. That district is knifing this town as surely as one individual member of it stabbed Fremont."

"And what do you care what happens to this town?" asked Dunbar.

Allen smiled. "I expect to make a good many speeches the next couple of weeks. Don't coax me into one now—I'm not prepared. Suppose I just say I like this town. Surprised?"

"Beyond words," said Dunbar.

"Well, and I like some of the people I've come to know. I know what they're trying to do for themselves and for the town. They're getting a good many things going, but now I've found something I can do."

"And what do you propose to do?"

"If enough people are in favour of it—and that's what I'm counting on—I'm going to help them either close up that district or bring it into reasonable control."

"Did it occur to you that the reason those establishments flourish is because an awful lot of people like to patronise them?"

"Sure."

"I believe you've been known to play a little poker and take a drink once in a while."

"That's right."

"Allen," murmured Mrs. Dunbar.

"But," said Allen, "you don't have to be a Carrie Nation to object to a vice district commercially organised for the purpose of making crooked profits. The vermin operating it are fly-by-night criminals who have no permanent interest in the future life of this town. If they just robbed ne'er-do-wells and adventurers who came here for the temporary excitement it wouldn't be so bad. But they set a lure and a trap for people who could be using their money and energy toward the development of this town. Besides that, you know as well as I do the relationship between wide-open vice and corrupt government. Do you want to start your town with that kind of burden? There have been eight

murders in that district in two weeks. That's not innocent recreation."

Dunbar threw up his hands and grinned. "I thought you weren't prepared to make a speech."

Allen laughed. "Sorry. A lawyer's weakness."

"Allen," said Mrs. Dunbar suddenly, "I've kept still long enough. This is the most absurd idea I ever heard of."

"Why?"

"I'm sure we shouldn't embarrass our guest by having a family discussion in her presence, but this is too important not to be settled at once—if you will forgive us, Mrs. Tyndall?"

"Don't pay any attention to me," said Sawyer. Mrs. Dunbar's veiled regret that an outsider was present making her wish she were far away.

Mrs. Dunbar gave her attention to Allen. "The very idea of a man of your education—and talent and breeding—and your opportunities—stopping to brawl with those low people. Surely there is some other reason involved in this fantastic notion."

Allen looked at his mother quickly, but said nothing.

"It was all right for our family to move here if that was what Overton wanted," went on Mrs. Dunbar. "His hardware business is doing well, we're building a comfortable home, and we're going to be happy. I'm sure of it."

"So am I," said Allen. "I expect to be very happy, too."

"But this isn't good enough for you, Allen," said Mrs. Dunbar. Overton Dunbar expelled a long sigh. "You must forgive me showing such unseemly emotion," said Mrs. Dunbar to Sawyer, with a little smile intended to let Sawyer see that she was not really wrought-up at all. "But," she said to her husband, "Allen has a brilliant future planned for him and, Allen," she continued evenly, "you simply mustn't throw it away on an impulse just because you're angry about something that happened to your brother. He is going to be quite all right, and that's always been your greatest failing, Allen—concerning yourself with wrongs and injustices which don't concern you. I thought you had learned that a man must look out for himself——"

"Let's not go into that," said Allen quietly.

"And what of Martha? That girl is waiting for you."

"Look, Mother," said Allen. "Martha is a very fine girl, and I am very fortunate to be engaged to her. But after all, it's up to the husband to decide where he and his wife shall live."

Remembering that words something to this effect had been her own at the depot, Sawyer glanced at Allen. He was avoiding her eyes. She touched her napkin to her lips to conceal a smile.

"But you don't *have* to decide that," said Mrs. Dunbar. "It's already

been decided. You're going to practice with Judge McCrae in Washington."

"You may be right," said Allen. "After all, I haven't been elected yet. Now look," he went on, taking in the whole family, "if you don't want to back me in this, that's all right. But I've made up my mind, and you might as well accept it."

Overton Dunbar got up and went around to Allen. He laid a friendly hand on his shoulder. It was the first time Sawyer had seen Dunbar make a warm gesture toward his son "I'm for you, boy. I'm for you a hundred per cent," he said.

"Thanks."

"Ordinarily, I don't like to see anybody telling other people what they ought to do. But there's no question about it, those criminals can't be considered a part of the town. They ought to go. By the way," said Dunbar, "what are your chances?"

"Dick thinks we may have an outside chance," said Allen "We're getting into it pretty late."

"Barney Foster is a very good friend of mine," said Sawyer suddenly. "Would it help if I asked him to support you?"

"Foster heads his own ticket," said Allen.

"You mean Judge Tanner? Oh, but you'd be so much better than he."

"Why do you think so?" he smiled.

"Well, just because. Judge Tanner is so old. I'm sure that if I spoke to Barney——"

"Please don't go to the trouble," said Allen.

Mrs. Dunbar said George could take Sawyer home in the surrey, but Allen volunteered. As they drove toward her home in the twilight, Allen said suddenly, "A narrow escape, wasn't it?"

"Fremont?" asked Sawyer.

"Well, Fremont, too. Just then I meant me—I almost didn't get to stay."

"Do you really want to stay?"

"I didn't know how much until you and I were on the way to the train. I mean that when I got to talking about the friends I'd made, my reluctance to have them go out of my life became very keen."

"But what if you don't win, Allen? What then?"

He thought about it a moment, staring into the dusk, then shrugged.

"I hope you do win, Allen. I do hope so."

She spoke so earnestly he looked at her inquiringly. Her expression was one of friendly solicitude.

"Thank you," he said.

Sawyer followed the campaign in the newspapers and became in-

creasingly excited as election day drew nearer. She saw the adroitness of Allen's manoeuvre in persuading four other lawyers to withdraw from the city attorney race and endorse him, thereby narrowing the contest to himself and Judge Tanner; Dick Robinson's editorials in support of Allen she wholly approved, but the editor's criticism of the ticket headed by Barney Foster she thought picayunish and unfair.

When Sawyer read Robinson's story in the *Sentinel* belabouring Tanner for un-American conduct, she remembered that she had been an eye-witness to the act of Tanner's the story referred to. In September, before Allen entered the race, she had been riding in one of the black-draped carriages of the procession to the school grounds, where a memorial service for President McKinley was to be held. At the corner of Main and Beech a man broke from the line of spectators, seized the American flag at the head of the procession, threw it to the ground, and jumped on it. Judge Tanner, who was riding with a number of other self-appointed dignitaries in the carriage ahead of Sawyer and Foster, leaped out, knocked the man down, and kicked him repeatedly, with shouts of "You dirty Red!"

At the time, the spectators cheered him. The late President was looked on as the father of the town. He had been assassinated by an anarchist, Leon Czolgosz, and feeling against Reds was running high.

However, the man had later committed suicide, and Dick Robinson, investigating, reported he had found that the man had been nothing more than a poor farmer, and far from being a Red, a life-long Republican. At the time of the memorial procession, he had just lost the claim on his farm through a flaw in his homsteading procedure which somebody had successfully contested. With his family destitute, he had been so distressed that he had, Robinson's story argued, undoubtedly been temporarily insane when he insulted the flag. The story suggested that the humiliation suffered at Tanner's hands very likely caused the man to take his life.

Sawyer asked Barney what he thought about the story the next time he came to dine with her in her tent—he dined with her every Tuesday and on Fridays took her to Everett's restaurant. Barney confessed that Tanner had made a mistake. Sawyer also wondered why Barney had dismissed Allen as "just a Y.M.C.A. orator" in a newspaper story: she assured him that Allen really was very much more than that. Barney was disposed to dispute it, and when she insisted on defending him, he said, "I didn't know you and Dunbar were such good friends. I assumed I had the pleasure of your support."

"You do have, Barney," she assured him. "But I hardly know Judge Tanner, and I'm well acquainted with the Dunbar family—I see Mrs. Dunbar two or three afternoons a week now, so of course I mustn't

be opposed to her son." Since Barney was showing this little annoyance, Sawyer saw no reason to mention that she had sent Allen a note congratulating him on a speech she had seen reported in the *Sentinel*, or that Allan had sent a brief, gracious reply which she had tucked away in her bureau. She reached across the table and pressed Barney's wrist. "You know I want *you* to win your mayor's race. I'd be crushed if you didn't."

He laid a hand on hers and laughed. "Just so you don't become a professional votes-for-women agitator. And don't pay attention to harsh statements in the press I may make about Dunbar. It's just politics—part of the game. I like the lad, and as soon as the campaign's over, we'll get along fine. Nobody gets angry about campaign statements."

Nevertheless, Sawyer saw one person, Overton Dunbar, become very angry because of a campaign statement.

At Allen's invitation, Sawyer had accompanied the Dunbars to the First Church, which, though it still held services in a revival tent, claimed the largest congregation in town. When the minister, a Reverend Josiah Haley, got up, it occurred to Sawyer that he resembled someone she might have once known, but as the service proceeded, she forgot about it. Haley preached a good sermon and obviously was popular with his congregation. On the way to church, Overton Dunbar had told Sawyer, "Haley's a fine preacher, and at the same time a real man!"

At the conclusion of his sermon, however, Reverend Haley reminded his congregation of the forthcoming election. Let every man vote as his conscience dictated, thinking only of the interest of the community. *He* wouldn't attempt to say one candidate was better than another, but he did feel it his duty as a spokesman for the decent, law-abiding element of the town to disclose that certain reports had come to him, the substance of which was that one of the candidates for city attorney, a young man whom everybody looked upon as honest and upstanding, nevertheless was said secretly to have the backing and endorsement of the representatives of crime, vice, and sin. He would hate to think, etc., but beware, beware!

Mrs. Dunbar, sitting on the other side of Allen, gripped his arm, but Allen only smiled and whispered, "I've heard the rumour myself. Somebody's spreading it around. You might expect an unworldly minister to fall for it."

After the service, while Reverend Haley was shaking hands with departing members at the tent exit, Overton Dunbar strode up to him and shouted: "Stick to your Bible, Mr. Haley! I don't like the implications you made about my son!"

"But, my dear sir," sputtered Reverend Haley, "I have only the

community's interest at heart. You won't deny the reports that your son is——"

"I not only deny it, I'll knock your block off if you repeat it!"

"Sir, you are addressing a man of the cloth."

"As long as you're a man of the cloth I'll so address you. When you descend to politicking you're a politician and I'll speak to you on that level."

Dunbar swung on his heel and walked in a fury to the family surrey. He got in and would have driven off without his family if they hadn't shouted at him.

As Allen followed Sawyer into the front seat, he leaned across and patted his father on the back. "Nice work," he grinned.

"A disgrace, the whole thing," said Mrs. Dunbar. "What will people think of us, parties to a brawl at church? Oh, Allen, I don't see why you wanted to get mixed up in this thing . . ."

Three days before the election, with the outcome of the race still very much in doubt, Judge Tanner went into a general store where a number of men were loafing, and, hoisting himself to a counter, began eating a lunch of canned tomatoes and crackers while he talked politics. Noticing two blanketed Indians at another counter, he thought to display his wit by delivering a number of jibes directed at the Indians. The Indians silently left the store. A moment later they attracted the storekeeper to a back window and prevailed upon him to lend them a bucket of white paint and a couple of hatchets, with which they promised to provide "some fun." Presently, two horribly painted savages, naked except for G-strings, pranced through the front door. Brandishing hatchets and uttering shrieks, they made for Tanner. He spilled his can of tomatoes in his lap, sat paralysed for a moment, then bolted for the door, ducking the hatchets as he went. He leaped into his buggy without untying from the hitching rail, and began lashing the horse wildly. The animal broke the rail, then ran away. Tanner, yelling in terror, was carried out of town and into the country.

When he made his way back an hour later, the joke had spread. He was greeted by snickers and howls wherever he went. Dick Robinson exploited the incident in a story which put the town in stitches.

All of Foster's ticket was elected—with the exception of Tanner. The counting of ballots by U.S. marshals showed Dunbar winner by 531 votes. One of the first acts of the new council was to appoint Tanner city judge to preside over cases which Dunbar would prosecute.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

FOR a few weeks Sawyer enjoyed tremendously her membership in the different little literary, music, and art clubs, and she looked forward to the meetings with increasing enthusiasm, especially whenever she was to participate in the programme. The first time she stood up before a group, to give a review of Kipling's *Kim*, she was sick with nervousness and the paper trembled humiliatingly in her hands. But the applause was so whole-hearted, the compliments so effusive, that she went home happier than she could ever remember.

At the outset Sawyer had an excruciating mental conflict to combat. On the one hand she told herself that she had nothing to fear of the clubs, for she was unquestionably the loveliest, best dressed, and wealthiest woman present, and that they would have to be conscious of their inferiority to her. On the other hand, she agonisingly suspected that the women had admitted her to their circles on dubious trial and thought her certain to be vacuous and ill-educated. Her delight was boundless when, at meeting after meeting, she continued to surprise them with her knowledge of the classics, her reading in poetry, and, most of all, by her musicianship at the piano. And time after time she whispered a prayer of thanks to her Uncle Daniel for having insisted that she be trained in these accomplishments.

For a time she took delight from a conviction that she was at last the person she had visualised herself as becoming: *the* leading young matron of the town.

Then, gradually, she began to wonder doubtfully whether, after all, her conquest was as complete as she had at first thought. The women gave her nothing substantial to hang the doubt on—no more than looks or inflections which might be interpreted either of two ways. Was she failing to live up to the role she was playing? For example, as much pleasure as it gave her to make a point of being the most carefully groomed woman, was it possibly tactless to display a different frock or hat for every meeting—all of them white, to be sure—when the other women had only one or two “bests” which they were forced to wear at meeting after meeting? And, she wondered, had her eagerness to be in the thick of the discussions led to to talk too much, so that she seemed to lack the reserve older women might expect of a much younger one? Once the questions presented themselves, she followed an inclination to answer them in the painful affirmative: the women probably *thought* she was ostentatious about her dress at any rate. She told herself that perhaps she did offer her views a little too readily and at too

great length, but if she was over-eager, it was only because she felt the discussions were the approach to the better way of living which she, and she assumed the others, were seeking. Preoccupation with culture offset the ugliness of the new, building town, it offered a rise above the everlasting grubbing for a living to seen on every hand. But, Sawyer slowly became aware, the women weren't taking advantage of half the opportunity for elevation and escape from drabness which the meetings could offer. They came together on a pretext of mutual interest in literature and music, but actually they got together to engage in feminine gossip and chit-chat. Sawyer, already in a state of restlessness which made her increasingly nervous, began to resent bitterly the women's hypocrisy.

One afternoon Sawyer played a piano programme of excerpts from symphonies at the Thursday Musical Club. She had worked hard on the programme—everything she did these days she worked at furiously hard—and as she played she dreaded reaching the close. She knew what would be sure to happen before another quarter-hour had passed.

Her musicianship was applauded and complimented, and then, gradually, as she had anticipated, the discussion about the composers became desultory, until, at last, one woman mentioned that her child had lost two front teeth, which reminded another of the difficulty her husband was having getting his bridge-work repaired, and then——

The mumps . . .

The measles . . .

The diapers . . .

The enemas . . .

The "My Charlie snores so, I sometimes feel like just going and sleeping on the sofa . . ."

Then "My Edgar simply won't eat cabbage, no matter how I fix it . . ."

Sitting on the piano stool, hands helpless in her lap, Sawyer faced the rising barrage with a growing anger and impatience. It wasn't only that she was so much younger than the other women. Besides that, all of them had husbands and most of them had children. And as much as they may have enjoyed their periodic tilts with culture, there was always uppermost in their thoughts their roles as wives and mothers. As a result, domesticity inevitably took over and swamped the basic purpose not only of this club but of the other clubs Sawyer had recently joined. As soon as the paper on Dickens had been read and discussed, or the excerpts from Longfellow recited and interpreted, there began this rising tide of reports on current family ailments and idiosyncrasies. Through it, Sawyer had to sit silent. It wasn't only dull; the domestic topics subtly assailed her with implications that her own life was incomplete.

She asked herself why she didn't get up and walk out of the meeting.

Then, she noticed a young woman across the room regarding her. With curiosity? Or amusement?

A new member. Sawyer had met her an hour before. What was her name? Penrose? Something like that. Why was she looking at her so? She had dark brown eyes, a little squinted and mischievous. Mobile red mouth—sceptical. Completely at ease—an air of detached indifference about her. Except for an unusually large bosom, a trim figure, her costume modish and pretty expensive-looking. Funny how the fuzzy puff low on her forehead, hardly an inch above her heavy eyebrows, gave her a sensual look. Twenty-six or so, probably.

Sawyer stared back questioningly.

The young woman smiled, her lips drawing back from large white teeth. She said across the room, "Play something more for us, won't you,"

"What would you like?"

The young woman shrugged, a loose gesture of one gloved hand indicating the other women engrossed in their gossip. "Anything apt."

Taking her cue from the woman's sardonic inflection, Sawyer swung around on the stool and thumped out Brahm's "Cradle Song," playing it in as infantile fashion as she could manage. The young woman sauntered over and leaned on the piano. Sawyer finished and looked up at her: the young woman's lips twitched slyly.

The women in the room paused in their gossip to applaud. "Lovely, isn't it?" cried one. "I played it often when I was carrying Ralph. I thought it might soothe him."

Sawyer grimaced.

"Come on out to the kitchen or somewhere," whispered the young woman. "They'd never get your point."

Sawyer followed her obediently.

The young woman hitched herself up on the corner of the kitchen table and swung a limb. Again, she smiled, her red lips—slightly rouged, Sawyer guessed—writhing undulantly over her white teeth. An extremely generous mouth, thought Sawyer, but it went well with her heavy jaw and bold chin.

"Pretty awful in there, isn't it?" said the young woman cheerfully.

Sawyer clenched a fist on the counter of the kitchen cabinet. "In another minute—— But how did you know what I was thinking, Mrs.——"

"It's Pendleton, but call me Kitty. Or Kit. I know you're Sawyer."

Sawyer crossed her arms indignantly: "Played it while she was carrying Ralph indeed!"

"To soothe him."

Sawyer paced the length of the kitchen and took a swipe at a dish-

towel hanging by the door. She turned and smiled ruefully: "I don't know why I'm in such a despicable mood."

"Oh, don't you?"

"What?"

"How did a couple of attractive wenches like ourselves get hooked into a hen party, anyway?"

"Maybe there's nothing wrong with them. Maybe it's just me."

"Mmm-hmh," agreed Kit owlishly.

"What do you mean, mmm-hmh like that?" demanded Sawyer.

Kit pursed her lips. "Nothing. Except there was a drear phase in my life when I got pretty fidgety, too. But you know, I was a little surprised to find you at a meeting like this. Do you belong to many of these clubs?"

"Five. Mrs. Dunbar—she's been very nice—persuaded me to join them."

"I gather Mrs. Dunbar belongs to about every such club in town. She got me into this one, too."

"But why were you surprised that I should be a member? Don't you think I'm good enough for them?"

"What an odd question. I don't know about the 'good enough' part. I'm not very clever at judging that sort of thing. But I somehow had a picture of you as the gay, vivacious young widow of wealth, flitting about—certainly not someone going in for mutual self-improvement with a clutch of old hens."

"What else is there to do? I've worked and slaved building my house, and lately I've been wondering just what I'll do when it's finished. Sit in it and hold my hands the rest of my life as I wither into an old crone? Oh, I didn't mean to say that. These clubs are all right. They're something to do."

Kit shrugged. "Wonder if Mrs. Whoosit has anything potable cached out here? I couldn't abide her tea."

Sawyer's eyes followed Kit as she wandered about the newly-painted kitchen, prying into cupboards, peering into the pantry. She wondered how she happened to find herself on such intimate terms with this Mrs. Pendleton in the space of minutes. They had somehow dispensed with the polite overtures of strangers getting acquainted; they might have known each other for months. Just who was Kit Pendleton, anyway, and why hadn't they met before?

Kit emerged from the pantry with a bottle. She held it close to her face. Myopic, thought Sawyer; it explained the faint squint-lines around her eyes—too vain of her looks to wear the glasses she needed.

"Sherry," pronounced Kit. "Cooking grade. Like to take a chance on going blind with me?"

"Do you think we should?"

"Yes."

"So do I"

Kit poured into two tumblers and lifted her own. "To men, God bless 'em."

Sawyer, raising her glass to her lips, paused. A funny toast. Kit had closed her eyes to toss off the wine like whisky. Sawyer took a swallow.

"Hope you don't mind an old hag like me leading you astray," smiled Kit. "A bit on the debauched side, you know, this slipping out and tipping in the kitchen."

"In my present frame of mind," smiled Sawyer over her glass, "I'm susceptible to any suggestion—even murder."

"Feel murderous?" murmured Kit. "Just what is your frame of mind?"

"Just what is yours?" countered Sawyer.

"Ennui. Trapped in Botany Bay."

"Where?"

"The Australian place. Where the criminals were shipped."

"You don't like it here?"

"Well, I intend to do something about it. That's why I beckoned you. I want to plot. Look! Let's say Mrs. Dunbar is a ringleader of a certain set. They're all right, but people like us who like living don't belong in it, any more than we belong in the circle of that fascinating harlot Cecilia Trevaine."

"Do you know Cecilia Trevaine?"

"Do you?"

"I rode part way out with her."

"You did? That should have been delicious. Riding out with the town's madam-in-chief of all the bawdy houses."

"She's——? Oh, I saw the circus leaving some time ago and supposed she went with it."

"I didn't know she'd been with a circus. Pen and I didn't come out till they built the railroad through—no covered wagon pioneering for me!—so I'm not up on all the local history like you First Founders. I saw the Trevaine gal in Vera's Millinery. And by the way, I wouldn't feel sorry for her. She was acting pretty important. She bought a hat I was dying for and couldn't afford. I was furious. The point I'm getting at, though, if life is to be bearable, we've got to get up our own crowd. I'm electing myself recruiting officer for young people, married or single, who want to have fun. You know—dances, whist, euchre, picnics, anything to keep ourselves from perishing. Like the idea?"

"Very much."

"I haven't thought it out in detail yet. The fact is, I thought of it while—forgive me—you were boring me to death with your Beethoven."

Pen and I've already met a few people who promise to be fun. Be one of us, won't you?"

"I'm for anything."

"As a matter of fact," said Kit, "you should be our rallying point—you've got everything it takes."

"Have I?"

"There are an awful lot of attractive single men in town. Come out to make their fortune, you know. We'll corral the cream of them. I love men, don't you?"

"Well——"

"Men simply fall for me right and left. Don't think I'm vain—oh, you might as well think so, since I am. It isn't that I lure men purposely. Pen—my darling husband—admits I don't. Pen says I must give out some kind of mating smell. But men are important. Aren't they?"

Sawyer shrugged.

Kit, tilting her head, squinted speculatively.

"How do you stand it?" she asked.

"Stand what?"

Instead of answering directly, Kit poured herself another glass "Want more?" Sawyer nodded absently. "You know, I'm going to confess something. I'm that scandalous untouchable—a divorced woman."

"You are?"

"I wasn't sorry to be free of him, but, you know, I found that after being used to having a man, it's—well, it's like an opium eater having his supply cut off." Her lips curled satirically. "Isn't it?"

Sawyer put down her glass. "I hadn't thought of it."

"I couldn't bear it myself. God, what a relief it was when Pen fell for me and I was leading a normal life again. Being married may not be pleasant sometimes, but then not being married after being married——" She laughed. "Don't mind my vulgarity, will you? I'm naturally a very vulgar person."

Sawyer searched for a change of subject. "Tell me something."

"Anything."

"I can't help wondering what brought a person like you to a town like this."

"What kind of person am I?"

"I don't know. Oh—you're nice. But I mean, you're—well, urbane. Forthright——"

"Worldly wise? Bizarre? Enigmatic?"

Sawyer laughed.

"I'll tell you why I'm here—it's very simple," said Kit. "Pen and I came out from Baltimore—we haven't any children, incidentally—Pen says I'm sterile as a mule, but fun anyway. Pen's got on as manager of

the ice and coal plant. By the way, if I get to talking veddy, veddy British, which I do sometimes when I'm a little tipsy, just bop me on the head. Got it from pater. He was a remittance man out of dear old England, black sheep, pater was, one of the best, and some of his blather still sticks to me. I'm American as dishwater myself. And that's me."

Sawyer suspected Kit's answer had been evasive. "Still," she said, "I wonder why you came out."

Kit squinted at her. "Gal, when I used to read Wild West stories I understand there were two questions you didn't ask a stranger: where he was from and especially why he left."

"I withdraw the question."

Kit smiled. "There's nothing mysterious about it. Pen simply thought he might do better here, and I was for it because it smacked of adventure. But I can see this is going to become one more dull town unless we do something about it."

"I agree!"

"And now I want to apologise."

"For what?"

"For disliking you so much until to-day."

"But we didn't even know each other."

"But I knew about you. I knew you were the Miss Rich Bitch—forgive me—charming effect of the sherry—the Miss Gold Mint of the town, and I've seen you going along the street with your nose stuck in the air."

"I haven't done that!"

"You were just too pretty and had too much money for me to like it. When you were doing the Paderewski act in there I thought you were just a smug little highbrow. Anyway, I was plotting how to bring you down a peg or two—wasn't that vile?—when I realised you were as bored as I was. I thought if we had a little talk, we might learn the truth about each other and hit it off. I'd like to be friends."

"Let's, then."

Their hostess, Mrs. Smithinson, the doctor's wife, appeared in the doorway.

"What are you two brewing out here?" she asked pleasantly.

Sawyer stepped in front of the bottle and glasses.

Mrs. Smithinson went to a counter and got a plate of tea biscuits. "Come on back where it's fun," she urged.

Kit groaned after the woman's retreating back. "Where it's fun. They must be discussing morning sickness then—what a treat."

She poured another drink. "More?" Sawyer shook her head. Kit tossed it off, and said, "Shall we join the ladies?"

"Mightn't they smell our breaths?"

Kit took a packet of Sen-Sen from her pocket-book. "This is my armour. Try some."

As they went through the dining room, Kit said, "Do you know any Tchaikovsky?"

"He's pretty modern for me."

"I heard a concert of his work at Baltimore last year. Pen says it sounded like a couple of cats on a tin roof, but I went wild about him. Like to hear one of his pieces?"

The older women didn't pause in their gossip as the two entered the parlour and went to the piano. Kit evidently played by ear, but the way she played "None But the Lonely Heart" had a sentimental quality that Sawyer found pleasant. As Kit finished, a middle-aged woman across the room said severely, "Wasn't that the Russian Chow-What's-His-Name?"

"Yes," said Kit.

"I don't like him," said the woman. "He's suggestive. He's—well, he's indecent."

"But," said Kit, "I'm a fervent admirer of indecency myself."

The woman stared at Kit stonily, then abruptly cut her eyes away.

Kit winked at Sawyer and whispered, "Certainly blotted my copy-book with her, didn't I?"

Sawyer winked back at her.

Sawyer offered Kit a lift, but since Kit had been brought to the meeting by Mrs. Dunbar, she supposed she really ought to let Mrs. Dunbar take her home.

Sawyer was a bit disappointed: she had wanted to give Mrs. Pendleton the pleasure of riding in her carriage. Beyond doubt, the graceful cabriolet was the handsomest vehicle in town. Slung like a reclining quarter-moon on elliptic springs, the body, mahogany-trimmed, was oil-painted a grey about the colour of Sawyer's eyes, and the folding top was grey leather. The interior, including the leather upholstery, was done in a lavender hue, and the sun sparkled on steps, hubcaps, and lamps of plated silver. The coachman who drove her pair of matched Cleveland bays was a twenty-year-old Indian boy named Joe, whom Sawyer had employed at the behest of Falling Leaf, his aunt. Joe had looked so ill at ease in a uniform which she provided for him that Sawyer sent it back and contented herself with the thought that his blouse, invariably a bright red or yellow or blue, worn with work pants and moccasins, lent an exotic, foreign note to the turn-out. At first she was self-conscious, though pleasurably so, of the goggle-eyed stares her carriage attracted, but before long the splendid sight became an

accustomed one and few people looked up in astonishment when she went by.

While riding home on this particular afternoon, Sawyer reflected on the kitchen conversation with Kit Pendleton. In retrospect, she wondered if there hadn't been moments when Kit had been making fun of her. Not maliciously, but in a quiet feline kind of way. She was companionable—fascinating, really—and Sawyer looked forward to the plans she had outlined. Still, she had taken a delight, Sawyer was sure now, in trying to read Sawyer's mind and then insinuating what her findings had been. All that talk about men hadn't been in very good taste. She probably should have stopped it. And yet, Kit's breezy assumption that a young widow had physiological pressures disturbing to the emotions was the sort of thing everybody thought about widows, she supposed. Of course, it wasn't true. It was pretty sordid even to think about it. She wasn't a cow.

All at once, she had an image of Barney's great shoulders and heard the tone of his voice rumbling in his chest. As uninvited and fleeting as the image was, she suddenly felt unclean and nasty.

She stopped the carriage and told Joe she would walk the rest of the way home. She set off with long, rapid strides, as if determined to tire herself.

As she passed the high-school grounds, she saw boys and girls sitting in the gentle sunlight on the steps of the two-storey frame building. Youths were scrambling over the ramps and scaffolds of the brick building behind, which had reached roughly a height of ten feet. On the baked earth of the playground, students of different ages were playing croquet and football and blind man's buff.

Two girls on bicycles wheeled past her, shouting, "Hello, Mrs. Tyndall!"

She turned and looked after them. Why, they were only a few months younger than she, and yet—and yet—oh, how fresh and clean they were in their short cycling skirts, their crisp blue middie blouses, and red ribbons swinging at the ends of their pigtails. Light-hearted, their minds not cluttered with shabby impulses and degenerate thoughts.

She strolled over to a croquet game, wistfully wondering whether they might invite her to enter into their play. As she approached, there was a subduing of the hilarity. A boy who towered over her from his height of six feet invited her to take a mallet. But he called her "Mrs. Tyndall."

"I'll just watch you," she said.

After a while they forgot she was there. They became boisterous again.

She turned away and hurried on home.

Before entering the central section of her house, into which she had moved, Sawyer walked around the wings to see how work was progressing. The carpenters regarded her with uneasiness. Of late, she had been snappish at unpredictable times and almost impossible to satisfy. They sensed that at this moment she was in search of an opportunity to criticise.

Unable to detect anything amiss, she went into the house.

Falling Leaf sat cross-legged on the parlour rug, turning through a fashion magazine. Looking at the room, Sawyer saw the woman had not done an iota of the dusting she had been told to do.

Sawyer almost bit her head off.

Before the stunned woman could make reply or apology, Sawyer curtly told her to go to the tent and prepare supper. She herself went upstairs.

Her bedroom, its decoration based on her bow-canopied Queen Anne bed, was papered in light blue dotted with clusters of yellow flowers, lace curtains with overdrapes of darker blue at the windows, on the floor a thick rose rug. The china shades of her silver lamps were decorated in hues that matched the room. On the walls were a number of romantic French water-colours and scattered here and there were knick-knacks dear to the feminine heart. It was a pleasant room.

Still angry, and warm from walking so fast, Sawyer jerked off her suit and shirtwaist and flung herself down at the dressing table. She let down her hair, then plaited it into a single braid. She reached for the yellow tie-back bow of the nearest drapery and unhooked it. She re-tied it as a ribbon at the end of the braid and threw it over her shoulder.

She stood away from the mirror and looked back at her reflection. The pigtail hung to her waist. She came close to the mirror, leaned on the dressing table, and gazed at the reflection of her face.

A schoolgirl?

Grey eyes troubled, bewilderment in her lifted eyebrow, lips slackened. The image of another face flashed and faded: Kit Pendleton, her mischievous eyes knowing, her mouth twitching insinuatingly, raising her glass in a toast.

"I can't be a little girl again!" she said aloud. "I don't *want* to be a little girl. I don't even want to. Oh damn, damn, damn!"

She snatched off the yellow ribbon and threw it on the floor. The braid she whipped around her head in a coil.

She sank into the Boston rocker. There was a copy of *Cosmopolitan* in the magazine rack beside it. She flipped the pages. The magazine fell open to an article by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, its title shouting, "The Restlessness of Modern Women."

She flung the magazine away.

She went to her bed and fell across it.

Presently, she reached out to the night table for the copy of Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* which lay there. She had stopped in at the bookstore a couple of weeks before and asked Mr. French for a poet who would be an antidote to the effusion of Swinburne she had listened to at the Over-the-Teacups Club that particular afternoon. He had suggested Whitman or Donne. She had once tried Whitman and had not liked him; she had never heard of Donne, but chose him anyway.

She had found a pleasure in Donne's forthright love poems which she would not have confessed to anyone. She had memorised half a dozen favourites. Just now, however, she found it impossible to read. Her reaction to the songs, she thought, was revulsion. She was too warm to concentrate, anyway, even in little more than her silk petticoat; her mind was a swirl of misty clouds. Pushing the book away, she lay on her back, thighs pressed together, finger-tips light on her breasts, and tried to breathe with quaking lungs which seemed filled with a substance heavier than air.

Unable to bear longer the engulfing sensation, she leaped to her feet. She stopped in the centre of the room and clasped her hands.

"O God!"

After she had spoken, she was aware of a silence so still that it throbbed.

The workmen had knocked off for the day, that was it; the hammering and sawing had ceased.

She decided to dress. As she went to the closet a voice within her said, "Don't." She replied harshly, "Shut up!" She took out a new suit of soft white serge which had arrived from Miss Gebhart only the day before. She selected a chiffon shirtwaist to go with it, one with intaglio buttons representing a Greek youth's head. She hadn't had before a suit with inverted sleeves: the full forearm and tight cuffs pleased her. Having dressed with care, she touched behind her ears with eau de Cologne. She scrutinised her face, running her finger-tips over her cheeks to enjoy the satin smoothness of her skin. She touched the little brown spot on her cheek, faintly smiling as she did so. She stood off, and turning this way and that, examined critically the features of her figure.

Suddenly, she scowled at her reflection and made an ugly sound of contempt with her lips. She threw a wool coat over her shoulders and went rapidly downstairs and across to the tent. She discovered, once she sat down to table, that she was not hungry . . .

Later, pacing the darkening red parlour, not having lighted the lamps, she heard a horse and vehicle drive up outside.

The resolved, secret side deep within her that had dressed and perfumed her with care, robbed her of appetite and set her to pacing, gloated. She slipped to a window and peeked out. In the dusk she could not recognise the occupant of the runabout. "I want to see you about business," he had said the day before. "Maybe I can get out to-morrow night." But the figure getting down was too slight for Barney's.

Resentful, yet almost sick with the relief of escape from deliberate wantonness, she withdrew from the window and awaited the knock.

When it came, she lit two lamps and carried one of them to the front hall and opened the door.

Fremont Dunbar stood there.

Dressed in Sunday best. Greenish grey suit with greenish blue stripes. Pointed yellow shoes. Yellow gloves. Bound-brimmed black hat square on his head—until the instant the door opened, when he hastily pulled it off, mussing his bear-greased hair. Stiffly in left hand a bouquet of chrysanthemums in green waxed paper.

"I thought I'd come and see you. Here."

He thrust out the bouquet. She took it and smelled the button mums.

"Why, Fremont! How nice! Come into the parlour!"

He stood awkwardly in the centre of the parlour while she arranged the flowers in a vase and set them on the piano.

"Sit down, won't you?"

He collapsed to the small sofa, and she sat in an easy chair near it. There was a pause.

"Did you——" began Sawyer, and at the same time Fremont blurted, "I thought——"

"You go ahead," said Sawyer.

"I've forgotten what I was going to say."

There was another silence.

Fremont sat upright, knees together, hands clenched in his lap, and stared at the opposite wall.

This won't do, thought Sawyer.

She began chatting casually: she asked Fremont what he had been doing, how was his father's business prospering, how was Tad getting along. Fremont answered her questions tersely. Sawyer, smiling, feeling very sure of herself, kept lightly tossing him the conversational ball, and ignored his fumbles.

After all, he was the first man who had ever paid her a courting call. True, he was younger than she—no, wait!—heavens, she thought—he's probably the older—it's just that he *seems* the younger. But—he shaved before he came. His face is powdered and there is a thin white crust where he rubbed alum on a nick in his chin. His complexion a little pimply, true, but his features—well, mature, one could say. And

she had attracted him. Had he ever made love to a girl? Did he know anything about courting? Well, he *had* brought flowers.

Even as she talked, she tried to visualise herself in public with Fremont. Riding through the town, going into Hollaway's Confectionery for an ice cream. It wasn't satisfactory.

"How's your wound, Fremont?"

"Oh, gone if not forgotten." He lifted his left arm and rotated his shoulder. "Good as new."

"I'm glad."

There was a silence.

"What made you decide to come and see me this evening?" she asked.

"Gosh, I don't know why anybody would have to ask that," he said.

"I mean, who wouldn't want to?"

"Oh, plenty of people."

"They'd have to be pretty crazy. I had to think about it a lot to get up the courage, I'll admit."

She leaned forward. "When did you think of it, Fremont?"

He swallowed. "This afternoon. When I saw you this afternoon."

"Where was that?"

"When you stopped on the high school grounds. I was upstairs. I had to stay in."

"Oh. You had to stay in." She leaned back.

In the silence that followed, Fremont wrung his hands and at last said desperately, "Later, there'll be a moon. Would you—I mean—I would be honoured—would you do me the honour, I mean to say, of going for a drive with me?"

How long, Sawyer wondered, had he rehearsed that question before his mirror, only to muff it in the delivery. She might have pitied him, had not an irritability begun to chaff her again. Riding in the moonlight with the child who had had to stay in. Clumsy attempts at conversation. Sooner or later, he might let his hand fall accidentally on hers. Then what? Suppose he should blurt out that he loved her. What possible answer could she make?

"Some other time perhaps," she said.

Fremont nodded eagerly, as if relieved that she had declined. "I——" he began.

There was someone at the door.

Sawyer went swiftly to answer it.

"Barney!" she cried. "Come in!"

Foster's eyes flicked her face. "You're happy," he said.

"Oh," she said, lightly, "I don't know."

Foster halted in the parlour opening. Fremont scrambled to his feet.

"Good evening, Mr. Mayor."

Foster ignored the greeting.

"I didn't know you had company."

"Fremont just came by," said Sawyer.

"I'll come back another time," said Foster.

"No, don't go." She laid a hand on Barney's arm. "I know you've come to discuss important matters."

"I just came by," said Fremont. "I've got to be going, anyway."

"That's all right," said Foster.

"Do come back, Fremont," said Sawyer, and added, "I love sitting with you."

When she returned from letting Fremont out, Foster was taking papers from an inside pocket.

"Now to business," she said smiling.

She sat on the sofa, and he sank heavily beside her. He shuffled through the papers. "I suppose it's time you were being courted," he said, without looking up.

"Courtred?" scoffed Sawyer. "By that boy?"

He glanced at the piano. "Nice flowers."

"Aren't they?"

He cleared his throat as a prelude to a discussion of her business affairs. There was, he said, a brick company being formed. Samples of a clay dug near the river south-west of town had been sent to Chicago for analysis and pronounced ideal for bricks. It was possible to buy stock in the concern. He recommended that she take \$3,000 worth.

"Honestly, Barney, you're the most generous person to help me with my finances."

He turned his massive head to look at her.

She was sitting very straight, her shoulders thrown back. After a second, her lips parted slightly, and trembled, but her grey eyes stared unabashed and unwavering into his. He was the one who had to look away.

"My interest in your investments isn't altogether altruistic, Sawyer," he said calmly. "I'm very fond of you."

"We are the best of friends, aren't we? We have so much in common."

"We have. We could have more."

A shiver ran through her. "But—about the bricks. You think I should invest in it?"

"I think it is sound and should make you a profit within a few months. If you like, you can write me a cheque and I'll attend to the details, as I've done before."

"I'll go up and write the cheque now," she said, starting for the hall.

In her bedroom she lit the lamp on the writing desk and filled out

the cheque. Hastily blotting it, she started out of the bedroom, then paused and looked about. The bed was mussed where she had lain on it earlier. She quickly smoothed the counterpane, blew out the lamp, and went downstairs.

Barney stood in the centre of the parlour. She handed him the cheque.

"How much do I have—goodness, I'm out of breath, running up the stairs! How much do I have invested altogether now? Something like \$20,000, isn't it?"

"Just about. I can tell you exactly." He took a small black notebook from a coat pocket and opened it. "Here we are—the mine in the mountains——"

"Any gold showing yet?"

"The signs are good, they say."

"It was so much fun—our driving out to see it—though there wasn't much to see—two men and a hole in the rocks—but," she said, "it was fun, wasn't it, I mean, our driving out together? Goodness—I wish I hadn't run up the stairs."

"I've a hunch that mining stock will pay off big," said Foster, "and your railroad stock—that's sound. And then, here——"

He ran a blunt finger down the list as he talked. Sawyer, standing beside him, leaned toward him slightly until her left breast touched his broad arm. She kept her eyes riveted on the notebook, holding her breath. Barney turned a page. Doing so, he moved his arm outward against her breast and held it there. She stood firm against the pressure.

"Sawyer."

Not moving, she looked up troubled.

"Yes?"

He thrust the notebook into his pocket and took her in his arms. His mouth crashed down against hers, forcing her head back until her neck ached. His arms tightened until she felt her body would be broken against the solid hardness of his chest and stomach. She threw her arms around his neck and pressed his bruising mouth harder against hers.

His lips slid to her ear. The tiny bristles in his cheek stung her flushed face like nettles.

"Down here?" he asked.

"We'd better go upstairs."

They went up the stairs slowly, his arm around her, her head resting in his armpit.

Sitting in the darkest corner of the bedroom, she fumbled at buttons, hooks, and laces. There seemed to be thousands of them.

"Aren't you undressed yet?"

The deep, rumbling voice had a note of joshing in it.

She looked toward it.

He was standing nude across the room in the dysphotic glow rising from the lamp in the downstairs hall. A great, white, hairy giant. She caught her breath.

She fumbled at the lace of the tiny corset and tossed it aside and stood, lifting the hem of her chemise.

"What's slower than a woman undressing?" he chuckled.

"What——?" Her disturbed voice muffled as she bent and drew the chemise over her head.

"Let me do whatever you're doing. I know how."

. . . Walking away in the darkness with Cecilia Trevaine: "Here's a riddle—what's slower than a——" Cecilia Trevaine's husky laugh floating lustful from the creek . . .

He was coming toward her. Practised . . . she was only the latest of many—"like going into a store and buying a cigar . . ."

Clutching the chemise before her, she ducked under the ghostly extended arm and ran to the centre of the room.

"Don't."

"Sawyer."

"Don't touch me."

"Sawyer——" Advancing toward her.

"Stay away from me."

"Now listen!" An edge of iron.

He reached out and grasped the chemise. She left it with him and fled.

He sent one sharp word after her which she did not understand but which sent her flying faster down the stairs. She halted, naked, in the brightly lighted hall. Then, desperately, she turned to the left, swept aside the tarpaulin which covered the opening into the uncompleted dining wing, and ran into it. In the dark she collided with the studding, and dropped, stunned . . .

"Sawyer. Where are you?"

Lying on the floor, she saw Foster's silhouette towering in the opening.

"I can hear you breathing, Sawyer. I know you're in there. Speak to me."

"If you come near me, I'll kill you."

She could taste the blood in her mouth.

After a long moment: "I never raped a woman in my life. I don't intend to start to-night."

He vanished. She heard him going up the stairs. She wanted to cry out, "I didn't mean it, Barney." But she could not make herself speak the words.

Presently, she heard his footfalls descending. She dragged herself

close against the wall and huddled there. He reappeared in the opening, fully dressed.

"Don't look at me," she begged.

"I can't see you. I don't know what happened, Sawyer—— You sound in pain. Are you hurt?"

"Just go away, please, and don't ever speak to me again."

"I'm not going to desert you just because of a misunderstanding. You need a friend. I'm still going to look after you."

"Oh, Barney, how can you say that?"

"If you can't say there still is a chance for me——"

"I was out of my mind, Barney."

"Then we'll go on as in the past. And forget there ever was to-night."

He turned away and blew out the lamp, darkening the hall. She heard the door open and close, and, in a moment, the hoofs of his horse trotting over the hard ground toward town.

She lifted herself and crept up the dark stairs. Fumbling in a closet, she found a nightgown. She lit a lamp and went to the window. She called Falling Leaf's name several times before she saw the woman moving across from her tepee in the startlight.

"What you want?" Falling Leaf called up drowsily.

"I want you to come and sleep in the house."

Sawyer was in bed when Falling Leaf padded in.

"Sleep in the green bedroom," said Sawyer.

"I no sleep in bed. Maybe roll out. You want me here—what you 'fraid of?—I sleep on ground."

Falling Leaf made a pallet of blankets on the floor and blew out the lamp, and lay down with weary sighs.

Sawyer rolled painfully on her back and closed her eyes. O God, what had ever possessed her? She had been vile, and the vilest part was that she had treated a devoted friend like Barney Foster in such a base way. Worse, she forced herself to admit, it hadn't been just Barney she had wanted; any man whom she had known she could trust as completely would have served as well. She muttered an exclamation of disgust, and dully began calling herself the harshest names she could think of: immoral, selfish, gross, beastly . . .

Falling Leaf had begun to snore. Angered by the woman's indifference to her suffering, Sawyer cursed her, too, for a moment, then returned to her bitter self-flagellation.

CHAPTER TWENTY

FOR some time after the fiasco with Barney Foster, Sawyer shuddered at every recollection of it. She was sure she couldn't bear ever to face him again. One day, while walking along Main Street, she saw him approaching at a distance and she turned swiftly into a doorway. It happened to be a barber-shop, and the men looked up startled, but she marched straight through and out the back door and went down the alley to a side street. Barney continued to carry on her business affairs but did so by sending out the real estate man and council man, Carver, with proposals and information about her investments. She was grateful that he sensed that it would be embarrassing to be alone with him.

However, the memory of the night occurred to her less frequently as she joined with Kit in organising a younger set in the town. Although private and municipal construction continued at a rapid rate, the feverish atmosphere had subsided to something like normal living. For the older people, those with families and settled habits, the establishment of an accustomed pattern was welcome. For a good many of the young couples and single men and women the re-approach of humdrum existence after weeks of novelty and adventure was a threat. One reason why they had come out was to find something more exciting than their slow-spoke home towns offered, and exciting they were bound to have it.

So many young people in such a rebellious mood provided a situation ideal for Kit Pendleton's recruiting. She saw to it that not only did the kind of people she wanted become acquainted and band together, but that those she considered undesirable were kept out. She limited her group to young people who weren't prudish, who liked to dance, to play cards and tennis, who were clever at dinner conversation, who were interested in the theatre and other arts, who dressed well, and who showed promise of achieving business and professional leadership as the years went by.

And then, because she was a woman who got her greatest pleasure from manipulating personalities, she groomed Sawyer to take over the actual rule. Sawyer was eager for it, she had money, clothes and beauty, and all she lacked, Kit soon discovered, was an unwavering belief that she was superior to anyone she met. This final requisite for social leadership, which momentarily appeared in Sawyer from time to time, Kit hardened into an unshakable conviction; she accomplished it largely by flattery, partly by satirical jibes.

As her friendship with Kit ripened, Sawyer attributed to the flip, sophisticated woman all the qualities that she herself lacked and should

have in order to fulfil her dream of the consummate Sawyer Tyndall. In the process of trying to imitate Kit—her manner of speech, her gestures, her attitudes—Sawyer developed a crush on her like that of a pupil for a teacher. She strove to achieve Kit's insouciance, and she covertly learned Kit's effective little tricks for fascinating the male. Because Kit wore silk stockings even for daytime wear, Sawyer adopted the unusual practice. Sawyer thought of changing her coiffure to frizzy bangs low on the forehead. Kit, concealing her annoyance, said the style wouldn't look well on *her*, and Sawyer accepted the verdict. Kit liked to adorn herself with trinkets, and Sawyer took to doing the same. With the help of Wells Fargo Express, Sawyer redeemed her mother's emerald necklace and ear-rings from the Washington pawnshop. But until Kit expressed her delighted approval of the jewels, Sawyer had been considering keeping them locked away and adopting the amethysts and baroque pearls which Kit favoured for herself.

Sawyer asked Kit if she didn't think her wearing only white made her slightly freakish and really was to no point; she yearned to blossom in a variety of colours and materials such as Kit wore. Kit agreed readily. With considerable trepidation, lest Kit think them mediocre, Sawyer took her on the trip by rail to see the Gebhart sisters. Kit showed unlimited enthusiasm for the genius of Clara Gebhart, so delighting Sawyer that she insisted Kit order two dresses at her own expense. They returned in high spirits, having arranged for enough clothes to carry them through every conceivable kind of event during the winter.

Continual gaiety became a passion with Sawyer. "Excitement" was her keyword. Anything that promised to be "exciting" she was for, anything that threatened to be "dull" she rejected. An evening at home alone, or an afternoon, was a sorry condition to be avoided by any means. Like the leading youth playing "Follow the Leader," who seeks more and more reckless stunts for those behind him to imitate, Sawyer conceived that to be daring was not only her privilege but expected of her. At a party, only if some lesser female screamed, "Sawyer! how could you?" was the evening a complete success.

This flying from party to party in search of a still gayer, still faster life, coupled with her aspiration to be as much like Kit as possible, led her easily into a habit of drinking with Kit. Whenever Sawyer dropped by to see her friend of an afternoon, Kit invariably got out a decanter and urged Sawyer to join her in a glass of Madeira or thimble of brandy. Sawyer came to look forward to the pleasure of sipping with Kit as they chatted: a little brandy made the post-mortem of a previous night's party merrier and kindled inspiration for next week's plans. Before very long, Sawyer was agreeing with Kit that parties which threatened to be dull became exciting and one was much wittier and

more charming if one had a lift beforehand to lighten the tongue and put a sparkle in the eyes. There was always the danger of detection—although Pen knew they were drinking and did not disapprove, Kit made it plain she didn't want their little secret to go further—but they worked out a protective scheme; by making one glass of wine for everybody the custom at a whist party or evening of parlour games, they made it so their own breaths would not be exclusive: thereafter, during the evening, the two of them could repair from time to time to a bedroom or bathroom for a freshener of whisky or brandy from a little silver flask which Kit carried in her pocket-book.

Sawyer had some trouble with her conscience about the matter, but the skirmish was more or less one-sided. On the one hand, she did enjoy being daring, she was proving herself the peer of Kit, and no question about it, getting a slight edge on was fun. On the other hand, she well knew that ladies simply did not drink. But, after all, was she an ordinary lady?

Though Sawyer's devotion was occasionally a little too unrestrained to suit Kit, as in the case of wanting to copy her hair-do, Sawyer was invaluable to create the atmosphere Kit wanted. Kit, for example, early conceived that the crowd should wear formal attire on proper occasions, if for no other reason than to establish an emblem to set them apart from the common run of people. But it might have looked somewhat absurd to suggest at the outset that guests coming to the Pendleton's small house for dinner dress formally. Instead, to set the precedent, she suggested to Sawyer: "You're giving this reception as a house-warming, and your house is so lovely the guests should help make it a brilliant function. There's no reason why everybody should troop in like a bunch of dust-stained pioneers. Why not request evening dress?"

Sawyer was delighted. "But," she said, "does everyone have evening dress?"

"Most of them do, I expect—the kind you're inviting. And if there are any who don't," said Kit grimly, "let them get proper clothes—if they want to run with you."

The preparations for the house-warming almost drove Sawyer to a frenzy of distraction. She would never have been able to bring it off herself, she was sure, but Kit was always beside her, cool and efficient, managing the thousand and one details as if she were only planning a luncheon for six. Kit drew up the list of guests, she wrote the invitations, she ordered the champagne, she made the decision when Sawyer couldn't decide which of two gowns to wear. When the builder, Collins, made Sawyer burst into tears by stating flatly that the painting would not be finished in time, Kit sent her to her bedroom, and, after five minutes

with Collins, came up to tell Sawyer calmly that the painting *would* be finished.

There was to be a hundred and fifty guests. When Sawyer saw Barney Foster's name on Kit's list, she said quickly, "I don't think we should ask him."

"Why not?" asked Kit. "I thought you were close friends."

"Oh, we are!" said Sawyer. "But—I thought we were going to limit the guests to the younger crowd."

"But nothing! He's the mayor." Kit looked at Sawyer shrewdly. "You haven't—quarrelled?"

"Of course not!" said Sawyer hastily. "I only thought—well, he might not want to come to a dinky little affair like this."

"This soiree is not to be a dinky affair," said Kit sternly. "You must have the mayor." She smiled sardonically. "It's the privilege of our first lady."

The reception was not considered a dinky affair by the press. The *Sentinel* gave it two full columns, the *Globe* almost as much, both stories crammed with the most effusive adjectives at the command of the female reporters, who rhapsodised over every room in the house as well as over what the guests wore, what they ate, what they drank, and what they said.

A good deal of the brilliance of the reception was attributable to the skill of the caterer who came from Denver in response to Kit's detailed telegrams, equipped with everything from a string quartet to palms for them to play behind. For the decorative motif he placed in every room several crystal baskets of red and white carnations, and the air was heavy with their scent when the first guests began to arrive at the just completed yellow and chocolate house at eight o'clock on the appointed evening in early December.

The caterer's butler directed the gentlemen to the downstairs bedroom beyond the back parlour, and the ladies up to Sawyer's bedroom, where, as Sawyer had anticipated, the young women proceeded to seize the opportunity to gratify their curiosity by touring the entire second floor before descending.

The lavishly furnished house provided ample topics for light and enthusiastic conversation, but Sawyer herself outshone the new house and was the focus of attention. She stood radiant before a bank of carnations in the parlour to receive her guests. Kit, wearing a long-sleeved silver brocade to complement Sawyer's daring black, stood reassuringly beside her, but Sawyer, fortified, like Kit, with pre-party samplings of the champagne punch, was utterly sure of herself. Only the delicate flush of her cheeks, which had lost their summer tan, betrayed her bright excitement. Her black gown, its bodice swirled with black sequins

and its voluminous skirt glittering with great sequin butterflies, set off handsomely the emeralds and old gold of her mother's necklace and earrings. The stiff whalebone of the off-the-shoulder gown made her stand unusually erect, and her bosom swelling above the extreme décolletage was a warm pink suffusing to the creamy white of her shoulders and arms. Her corset was so tightly drawn that she easily met the ideal requirement of the day—a waist so small a man's hands could encircle it. She carried a small black enamelled fan edged in gold, and occasionally she flipped it open and fanned herself prettily.

She accepted the profuse compliments on her house gracefully, but they were like strokes of a pump swelling her pride. Only when Barney, most distinguished in white tie, appeared before her to pay his respects, did she become momentarily uncertain. But, smiling, he bowed formally over her hand, murmured, "A lovely party," and moved away. Twice, during the next hour, she saw him talking with groups of young people, but he departed early, and she didn't know whether to be glad or sorry.

Sawyer was most eager to know what Allen thought of her house and of her party; he had said, "It's all very nice," when he first came. Casually, she strolled among the guests, until, reaching the library, she saw him standing a little apart, looking at a book which he had taken from the shelves.

"Oh hello there," she said. "Are you having a good time?"

"Yes, thank you. I've been admiring your books."

"They're just a few things I've picked up—I've hardly had time . . ." No point in mentioning the hours she had spent with Mr. French going through book catalogues, to select her library, or that she had been more interested in sets with binding that harmonised than in titles—she still felt a little guilty about that. "You don't want to pore through an old book now," she said, taking his arm. "Have you tried the champagne punch?"

"Delicious."

"Come and have supper with me," she invited. "I want you to tell me things wrong with the house so I can alter them."

"It all seems perfect," he said. "You have excellent taste."

In the dining room, where the buffet was spread in the rosy light of silk-shaded candles, Sawyer secretly watched Allen's expression as the caterer boldly sliced straight down through what appeared to be an ordinary large turkey. It was considerably more than ordinary, however, for inside the turkey, which was boneless, was a boneless roasted hen, and inside the hen a guinea, in which was a pheasant stuffed with a squab, which in turn contained a quail which had hidden at the centre, an almond soaked in brandy. As they crossed to the parlour with their plates, Allen smiled, "Quite a turkey. Pioneering has indeed advanced

since Pilgrim days." This remark struck Sawyer as having so wittily hit the key of the evening, that she repeated it, and soon everyone had heard it and it became the memorable bon mot.

Only one misadventure marred the party, and Sawyer did not learn of it until next day, when Kit came for the inevitable post-mortem. One of the young men, somebody named something-or-other, having drunk more silver goblets of punch than he could handle, had wandered outside. A good many townspeople had driven out to the edge of Sawyer's land for a look at the brightly lighted big house from which sounds of music and merriment drifted, and the young man had staggered over in that direction and become very sick. Kit was furious.

"Every prude in town has seized on it as indisputable evidence that we gave a drunken orgy out here last night," she said. "One thing about it, *that* young man will never be seen at another party of our crowd. He's finished!"

"Oh, Kit," said Sawyer, in too happy a mood to be severe, "you shouldn't. After all, you and I had a slight edge on ourselves. And so did a good many others, I suspect— it *was* strong punch."

"There is a world of difference, dear Sawyer, between having an edge and being drunk," said Kit icily. "You're not to permit that young man the pleasure of your company."

"All right," agreed Sawyer. "I don't even remember what he looked like."

Kit particularly enjoyed exercising a control over Sawyer's escorts. Sawyer had no preferences: she didn't care who took her to dinners or dances so long as he was gay and considered her stunning. Kit's saying, "I don't think he's right for you, Sawyer; he doesn't appreciate how lucky he is," would be enough to put a young man out of Sawyer's favour. Kit had an eye for the future: Sawyer's re-marriage must be the most brilliant match that could be drawn from the available material. Of the hundreds of young bachelors in town, there were a couple of dozen Kit thought possible. Of these, but not the prize catches necessarily, the two who most ardently worshipped Sawyer were Doc Rogers, the good-looking and lively dentist, and Sam McCall, who owned a furniture store—Kit happened to like the way McCall's thick, freckled hands curled around a tiny wine glass as he frowningly told an excruciatingly funny story. Two other men who were sometimes paired with Sawyer, Dick Robinson and Allen Dunbar, Kit regarded with mixed feelings. They were men who, though friendly, had never given a sign of being devastated by Kit's charm; therefore, she judged them to be hopelessly slow, to be put down simply as friends of Pen. However, both probably would become leaders in the community—were already,

as a matter of fact—and by that virtue they were eligible for Sawyer's company.

Kit learned that Allen was engaged—to an old friend of Sawyer. The discovery that Sawyer had a girl friend who might have been as close as Kit aroused her jealousy. It would be a neat revenge on Sawyer's old friend to rob her of her fiancé. She threw Allen and Sawyer together as much as possible, and eagerly watched for indications that they were progressing beyond friendship.

At the Christmas dinner dance in the Homer Hotel, Sawyer saw Barney across the ballroom. She had, by that time, recovered full confidence in herself. She waved her fan to him and flashed her most winsome smile. Barney came across directly and asked Sam McCall for a dance on her card. When the time came and they glided out on the floor, his arm around her friendly and firm, she was glad the awkwardness between them was near an end.

"Merry Christmas, Barney," she laughed.

"And a Happy New Year," he responded.

She smiled up at him: "You've been avoiding me. Have you found someone you like better?"

"That's not likely ever to be true, Sawyer," he said. "The fact is I've been reproving myself for neglecting you, but from all reports you've been keeping yourself occupied too."

"Oh yes! I'm so glad you could come to our ball. Having the mayor gives it an extra grandeur."

"You dance beautifully, Sawyer."

"Thank you."

"You're a pretty good friend of Dick Robinson's aren't you?"

"Oh yes. He adores me."

"If you want to do me a favour—tell him not to be so unkind to me sometimes."

"Oh Barney, that's just politics, isn't it—those editorials? I don't follow that sort of thing."

"You're right. I was half joking."

"I'll put in a good word for you with him, though."

"It's just that it rather hurts to have someone—even an editor—misunderstand what I'm trying to accomplish."

"I don't see myself why he's always criticising your council. But," she laughed, "I suppose editors have a hard time finding something to write about—every day, I mean."

He chuckled. "Sure. Oh pshaw! The music's stopped."

Before they parted, she told him to come and see her soon. He looked steadily at her, and she averted her eyes. He gravely said he would come.

The ball over, Sawyer waited on the steps of the hotel while Sam McCall went to get his buggy. A number of people stood in the sheltered entrance out of the flurries of snow. She realised that Barney, an opera cape around his broad shoulders, had pushed in beside her. She felt his hand pressed slowly against her right thigh. She tensed and held her breath. At that moment a very drunk cowboy supported by a sober Indian staggered by, the cowboy drooling a snatch of gloomy song, the Indian saying, "That's okay, Old man Tadpole, I get you to a room," and as the pair disappeared into the snowy night, the people on the steps laughed. Sawyer laughed, too, and with a scarcely perceptible shift of position, she moved away from his hand, and the contact was broken. Neither looked at the other. He had asked, and her movement away was her answer.

Two days later, while making the rounds as a member of a committee under Allen's chairmanship, she went quite easily into Barney's office and got fifty dollars from him, which made him a patron of the opera house the committee was organising.

The theatre was converted from a warehouse which a man with more ambition than foresight had put up. The committee equipped the "auditorium" with folding chairs and built a stage at one end. To open it, the crowd put on an amateur show to raise money for playground equipment at the grade schools. Among the performers, Kit, to everybody's astonishment, played a trombone solo; Sawyer and Vera Grady, the popular, racy little milliner, shared an act in which Sawyer played the piano and Vera sang, "She's Just a Bird in a Gilded Cage." The old-fashioned clothes of the 'eighties they wore evoked laughter. The hit of the evening, because it was so incongruous, was Allen, in blackface, singing "I'se the Scamp of My Alley," followed by a clog dance which he performed with considerably more ardour than skill.

Two weeks later, the opera house committee obtained a touring Shakespearean company in a presentation of *Macbeth*, and, next to Sawyer's house-warming, this was the event of the season. Sawyer gave a dinner for twenty before the performance, and when her voluble guests swept down the aisle just before curtain time, they created a buzz of talk which fell pleasantly on Sawyer's ears.

Sawyer continued to put in an appearance from time to time at the ladies' "mutual self-improvement" clubs, but only often enough to discharge what she considered to be the obligation her position imposed on her. She sat through the meetings with a detached, aloof amusement, and offered comment only when there was an opportunity to set aright a lady in error about a poet or composer. Afterwards, if Kit were with her, they would drive straight to the house of one or the other to ridicule the programme over their glasses.

Criticism of Sawyer's crowd began in whispers, but inevitably became more outspoken. A substantial portion of the population considered card-playing and dancing a sin and looked on the theatre as an immoral influence. Some said the wealthy widow was piping her followers down a primrose path. The gossips used the term Fast Bunch to designate the set, and Sawyer liked it so well she and her friends adopted it themselves. Open censure came as the result of an accident which forced about a dozen couples, including Sawyer and Dick Robinson, to stay out all night on the far side of the river.

They had attended a rural party at a farmhouse—one of Robinson's editorial policies was for closer co-operation between town and country—and there had been a pie supper, a dumb marriage, and square dancing. The party broke up about three a.m., not unusually late for country parties, but when the young townsfolk reached the river in their rigs they found it so swollen from a rain upstream they couldn't ford it. It was noon next day before the river subsided and they finally got home, weary, hungry and cold.

As word of the misadventure got around, it grew with exaggerations, including the rumour that the unmarried young people had spent the night separated from the married couples.

Reverend Haley loosed a blast from the pulpit the following Sunday. The younger generation running wild . . . sin . . . waywardness . . . road to hell . . . disgrace to the community, even unto a certain city official and editor . . . sinful dancing . . . euchre . . . extravagance . . . immorality.

Dick Robinson replied in an editorial. He thought very little of an attitude which condemned young people having above-board fun but which tolerated and kept an absolute silence concerning a vice district which flourished in open corruption.

Kit and Sawyer and a number of others indignantly withdrew from Haley's church and joined a new church, which was still housed in a tent, where the Reverend John Bradford delivered plain, unemotional sermons on generalities. Sawyer suggested that they make this the fashionable church of the town. She promised the delighted Mr. Bradford a deed to a church site on her land, and pledged to contribute \$5,000 to a building fund as soon as he raised a like amount by popular subscription.

Allen and Dick were seen less often at the Bunch's parties, however. As Kit explained to Sawyer: "They're so all-fired hot on ridding the town of crooked gamblers and pickpockets they think they have to keep their own skirts clean. They think Haley put them in a light of being hypocrites and they've decided not to give their opponents any more ammunition than they have to. That," she sighed, "is the trouble with

being a reformer—you have to be as dull as the dullness you try to create.”

The two men did not withdraw altogether, and it struck Kit, to her satisfaction, that if anything Allen was seeking the company of Sawyer more frequently than ever. The couple were partners in the ping-pong tournament, he had Sawyer beside him at a dinner he gave at Everett's Restaurant, they had their picture taken in front of Roland Dince's tepee, and they went duck-hunting one frosty morning with Pen and Kit.

It was on the duck hunt that Allen learned that Sawyer was drinking more than wine.

They had ridden out to the river on horseback, Kit rigged in an old pair of corduroy pants, sweater, and boots of Pen, and Sawyer very dashing, she knew herself to be, in a black derby and dove grey riding habit with divided skirt. There were great numbers of ducks, and Sawyer and Kit took the men's guns once and tried their luck—which was meagre. Allen was a better shot than Pen, but red-haired Pen's comments when he missed were howlingly funny. It was cold in the blind. Pen had brought along a bottle of Scotch, and he, Kit, and Sawyer had a couple of drinks out of the tin jigger which screwed on top. Sawyer thought it rather stuffy of Allen not to take one too, though he merely said quietly, “I don't think I care for one, thanks,” but she had seen his eyebrows lift in surprise when she tossed off her jigger in a manner that could not have been unpractised.

As usual, the liquor lightened her tongue, and Allen, she was glad to note, laughed almost as heartily as the others at her bright witticisms. And when she seized on Kit's using the word “archaic” to pun, “Well, can't we eat archiac and have it too?” Allen's groan was loudest. Sawyer crossed her arms and snuggled back against the quilt in the blind and cozily felt the world a very fine place indeed.

One cold Saturday toward the last of January Allen rode out to Sawyer's house in a hired rig, shining black with yellow spokes, drawn by a handsome black stallion. He ran up her steps, rang the bell like a fire alarm, and when she answered the door, he cried, “Come ride out to see Lucy and George with me!” “Oh!” exclaimed Sawyer, her fingertips going involuntarily to her temple, “I would so enjoy a long ride and quantities of fresh air! Come in while I change.” “Better dress warm,” warned Allen, who was wearing a brown turtleneck sweater under his coat and topcoat, “it's below freezing.” Sawyer left him in the hall while she ran upstairs to dress. As she drew on heavy cotton stockings and buttoned on high shoes, she heard him whistling a snatch of tune in the hall below. Sawyer had been feeling rather heady—the effect of staying

up late the night before with Kit and Vera Grady over peach liqueur and the card game of "Authors"—but Allen's mood of boyish happiness was contagious: she herself picked up the tune he was whistling and hummed it while she snapped on a red wool skirt, pulled two sweaters over her head, and put on her sleek new seal coat. Instead of wearing a hat she wrapped a fringed wool scarf around her head and tied it under her chin. Pulling on huge bearskin gloves as she ran down the stairs, she tripped near the foot, and Allen, laughing, caught her and kept her from falling. When they were seated in the rig, Allen tucked a robe over their laps, and they set off to the west.

"The 'For Sale' signs on your lots look fine," said Allen enthusiastically.

"Oh yes!" said Sawyer, pulling her fur collar up on her cheeks. "I'm so glad Barney was able to get the time set ahead. You know—the town so overcrowded, new people coming in. And then, when the city is prepared to extend water lines and sewers out here, I'll be brought inside the city limits."

"Whose houses are those started? The McKenzies' is one of them, isn't it?"

"Yes, that one. And that one is the Williamses, and that one over there is somebody named Phillips, and that one—I think it's going to look nice, don't you?—the Ingles are building it."

"The whole tract should be built up within a year."

"Well, I don't know. A good many people have bought lots already, but Mr. Carver thinks those who have just finished erecting one house in town, even though they mean to keep it only temporarily, will probably wait a while before building a nicer house out here. Mr. Carver thinks mainly new arrivals will build right away."

The hoofs of the stallion rang on the frozen mud of the section road leading west. Snow patched the bright green of the winter wheat in fields on each side, and lay in furrows which awaited corn-planting time. They rattled across a completed wooden bridge at the first creek, but later they came to a bridge under construction, and crossed it carefully at the crew foreman's wave.

Allen began whistling again.

"You seem unusually happy to-day," said Sawyer brightly.

"I was waiting for you to notice."

"All right, why are you so happy?"

"Riding through the countryside with such a charming young woman would be——"

"Oh, come now."

"Very well, I'll tell you—I'm glad to tell you. You've heard of the valiant young city attorney who has been waging the battle of the age with the foul interests of Satan?"

"Mmm—I seem to have."

"Well, he's got in a knockout punch."

"Do you——"

"I mean that the city council has at last—this very morning, in fact—passed an ordinance ordering all gambling houses, three-card monte pitchmen, unregulated saloons, and kindred enterprises to clear out within thirty days."

"I was sure that if you thought the way they were operating was wrong Barney Foster would see it that way, too."

"Oh, you did?" said Allen warmly, "and how long did it take for Mr. Foster's obdurate, thick-headed, and, in my opinion, something more, council to get around to seeing it?"

"Well, after all, Barney's the servant of the people. He has to wait and make sure of what the people want before he acts, doesn't he?"

He regarded her wryly. "Oh, undoubtedly."

She didn't like his tone.

"I've never quite understood why you and Dick Robinson don't get along with Barney. Just about everybody else I know likes him a great deal. Barney's extremely popular, isn't he?"

"Extremely. He's very astute."

"Well, I like him—very much."

Allen's lips tightened and he flicked the stallion with the whip.

"I mean to say, Allen," Sawyer continued, "everybody has the interests of the town at heart, but just because some of us see things one way, and others of us see it a different way——"

"It's hardly important either way."

An annoyed frown knitted between her eyebrows. "I'm sure you didn't bring me out here to quarrel with me," she said coolly. "I'm not used to quarrelling with people."

"I brought you out here," said Allen, not intending to betray his exasperation, "because this is one of the eventful days in my life—for about the first time I've actually succeeded in doing something I set out to do—and I wanted to share it with you. I was prepared to accept your congratulations with all due modesty."

"You make me ashamed of myself."

"That wasn't my intention."

"Of course I congratulate you. What you've done is stunning. Single-handed, too!"

"Not single-handed. Dick's editorials probably did more to cement public opinion than anything I did. And, of course, it was the pressure of public opinion that brought the council to terms."

"Still, Allen, granting your victory must be more satisfying to you,

you must forgive me if I happen to share Kit's view that it is possible to so clamp down there's not any fun left. I mean, people have to have fun and everybody doesn't get his fun the same way. You couldn't expect a man who swings a pickaxe on the railroad extension to enjoy the kind of ball we give—so he goes to a dance hall that's to his liking. You don't want to make the burg dull, do you?"

"Nope."

"Sunday is all right—it's a very fine day when one goes to church and comes out refreshed and then sits around doing nothing the rest of the day. But who wants to live in a town where every day is like Sunday?"

"Is that something Kit said?"

"Perhaps. But it's true."

"And that dull burg remark—that's something from her, too, isn't it?"

"Whatever are you getting at?"

"Only that you—— Oh, I like Kit Pendleton—she's all right—but if she made herself into a carbon copy of somebody else—— Oh, I don't mean anything."

She waited for him to say more. When he did not, she felt distinctly annoyed. This was so tiresome, this bickering.

Irrked by his ineptitude, and embarrassed, Allen switched the horse sharply. It leaped ahead, breaking its trot, until he pulled the reins.

"That's hardly sporting, is it?" said Sawyer. "To take your temper out on a dumb beast?"

He mumbled something. She glanced at him out of the corner of her eyes. His expression was so unhappy. She should have been flattered that he chose her to be the first he would tell; instead, she had spoiled his triumph. Well, his attitude had given her enough uneasy moments; simple justice for the shoe to be on the other foot for a change.

"Now that you've so grandly won, Allen, you won't have to work so hard, will you, and can give the Bunch the pleasure of more of your time? I *have* missed dancing with you."

"All we've done is eliminate organised vice. There's more important work ahead. I—— But," he said apologetically, "I don't suppose you're interested in such things as franchises and sewer contracts?"

She smiled archly. "Nope." Tilting her head, she lifted one eyebrow. "Mind?"

He grinned. "Why should a girl be interested in such subjects?"

"You mean—a pretty girl?"

"A veritable paragon."

"Thank you."

Having competently got everything right between them again, she

adjusted the lap robe to mask her deliberate squirming a little closer to him, and prepared to enjoy the morning in his company.

Her expectation based on earlier observation of George and Lucy, Sawyer had thought to find the couple thoroughly unhappy. When she saw the Potters' three-room unpainted house nestled at the foot of a treeless ridge, she was sure she would find them so. Instead, Lucy coming out of the house, and George from the barn, greeted them with broad smiles and cheery hellos. Lucy had her six-weeks-old daughter on her arm, and her figure was lithe and strong. George's stride toward them was long and confident.

Inside, the house did not seem quite so dismal. In fact, it was cheerful, neat, and spotlessly clean. Sawyer's eye was caught by the burnished copper pans hanging in the kitchen, the white oilcloth on the kitchen table, where the family ate its meals, and she had to confess that Lucy's choice and arrangement of the simple living-room furniture was expert and pleasing. Taking off her coat in the bedroom, she exclaimed, "You have everything fixed so lovely, Lucy. I didn't dream you were such a wonderful housekeeper."

"Well, there's not much to it," smiled Lucy. "It doesn't take all my time, by any means. This youngster is the one who keeps me flying."

"She's so sweet. I know you're wild about her."

"I just *thought* some of the family might come out to-day, and I've got everything ready for a good dinner."

"Oh, we musn't impose on you——"

"You pallid city people should be needing a real farm meal."

George proudly showed Allen around the farm, and later, as they sat at dinner, George was full of hearty—actually hearty—talk about the eighty acres he had broken, the forty acres of wheat, his three cows, his team, the windmill he had just finished assembling.

"How could you have got so much done in so short a time?" asked Sawyer.

"Well, we've had to keep humping," admitted George. "But it's the life! What's new in town?"

Allen told of his victory, and George slapped him on the back, and Lucy said, "Thank goodness, that's over—I was sure one of those horrid people would shoot you."

Lucy served a good dinner, as she had promised. Then, visiting in the living room, Lucy and George talked enthusiastically of their plans for enlarging the house, a new chicken coop, a bigger barn after the first-year crops were in . . .

When it came time for Sawyer and Allen to go, the Potters came out and stood by the buggy for a final word.

"Wait till you visit us in the summer," said George. "I'm going to put

in a garden—I'll have all kinds of fresh vegetables to serve you."

"And oh, how much canning I have ahead of me!" said Lucy.

"Wait till a couple of years from now, when I've got my orchard producing," said George. "We'll give you grapes and peaches and apples—a regular Garden of Eden it's going to be."

Sawyer waved as they drove off; the Potters waved in return and cried goodbyes.

"Goodness!" said Sawyer, facing front again and snuggling under the lap robe. "I never thought they would like farming so well."

"I didn't think they'd last a month," agreed Allen

"What happened?"

"I'm not sure. Except that this is the first time since they were married that they've been off alone together in a house of their own. It was Mother's idea that they live with her and Dad in Philadelphia. Now they're away from the family."

Sawyer bit her lower lip thoughtfully. "There must be more to it than that. That seems sort of negative—and they're so happy! I'll tell you what I think it is. It's because everything either one of them does isn't just for himself alone—they're doing things together and for each other. Everything that happens—there are two of them involved. That darling baby. Each one of them so proud of it because he knows the other one is."

"That probably has a lot to do with it," said Allen. "An interest in other people or other things besides one's self—that's supposed to be a pretty good way to avoid unhappiness."

They rode in silence for half-an-hour, the ring of the stallion's hoofs and the rattle of the iron tyres the only sounds in the cold, fading countryside. A melancholy drifted in Sawyer, a sad, pleasant sickness. She breathed as slightly as possible to suspend it in her breast.

"Tell me, Allen," she said at last, "are you ever lonesome?"

He glanced at her brooding face. She was gazing distantly down the road. "Sometimes," he said. "Rather often, I guess."

"I am too. At least you don't live all alone—you have your family."

"You lead a busy life—dances—and dinner parties . . ."

"Yes." She sighed. "Darn George and Lucy Potter for being so cheerful! I never felt so lonesome as I do right now."

"A fine tribute to the gaiety my company inspires," said Allen.

She wrinkled her nose at him and snuggled closer under the robe. "You *would* choose to deliberately misinterpret me!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

"BUT I still say, Mr.——"

"Cook. My lady friends call me Ollie."

"I don't handle any of the sales directly, Mr. Cook. You should go and see my agent, Mr. Carver."

"If that's what you want. I think if we had a little chat you might not want him in on it."

"Why not?"

"It's pretty cold out here—I've been waiting half-an-hour. Why don't we go inside? Maybe we can talk better."

Sawyer surveyed the dapper man beside her carriage, one oxblood-gloved hand on the rim of the rear wheel. Repulsive kind of face, little eyes, unpleasant smile, insolent inflection.

"I don't think that will be necessary," she said. "I've been out all morning and I planned to rest. Please see Mr. Carver."

He took his hand from the wheel and bowed, holding his derby over his chest. "As you want it, kiddo. But I don't think Mr. Carver will be made very happy by it."

He got into his buggy and drove away. She got down, leaving Joe to take the carriage around to the stable. Unbuttoning her green wool coat as she went up the front walk, Sawyer lifted her shoulders to shrug off the queer distaste the man had aroused.

Twenty minutes later a youth on a bicycle arrived with a note from Mr. Carver. "Come to my office at once," it read. "Imperative."

"Oh bother!" said Sawyer. But she put on her coat again and went out to the stable . . .

Before she could lower her knuckles from the door of Carver's upstairs real estate office, Carver himself flung open the door. "Come in!" he said.

The man Cook was slouched in a straight chair against a wall, his neatly folded overcoat and derby on the floor beside him. Long legs crossed, he swung a red shoe encased in a blue-checked spat. He did not rise as she entered.

"What have you done?" pleaded Mr. Carver.

"I? I haven't done anything," said Sawyer.

"This man——"

"He wanted to buy some lots. I told him to come and see you."

"He has! Oh, dear."

"What's wrong?"

"Sit down, if you please."

She sat in a chair at the side of his rolltop desk, her muff in her lap. Carver flopped into his swivel chair and picked up a piece of white paper from the clutter of papers on the desk. He studied it a moment.

"This is a copy—so this man Cook tells me. But did you ever sign anything like this?"

She accepted it and read it.

"I don't remember that I——"

"Think hard." Cook spoke casually, not pausing in the lighting of a cigarette.

Sawyer looked at him, annoyed.

Cook blew out a morning-glory puff of smoke. "Last November twenty-third," he said, "there was five wagons spent a week down on one corner of your land. After their first night there, the men asked you if they could stay until they could get located somewhere. You told them they could. After they'd been there a week, a couple of them came to your house and paid you rent for the privilege."

"Oh, yes," said Sawyer. "I remember that. Yes, I signed this receipt—or one like it. I didn't want any pay. But they insisted."

Carver groaned.

"What was wrong with that?" she asked.

"I'm not sure yet. It could be bad. Oh, why did you sign anything?"

"The two men insisted on it. They were very pleasant—they were farmers, I think. They said they wanted it to be businesslike. I thought it was honest of them to want to pay, though, as I said, they were welcome to camp for nothing until they could move to—wherever they were going. They—— But what difference does it make? I'd forgotten it."

"I'm not a lawyer," said Carver. "But this man Cook seems to know what he's doing."

"I do, brother," said Cook. "I know the homestead law."

"Sawyer, I hate to say this—and don't get upset till we learn more—but you may have jeopardised the title to your land."

"What?"

"Now don't get excited."

"But Mr. Carver!"

"This is a delicate situation. I don't want to sound selfish, and I'm going to do all in my power to help you—count on me—but after all, I am a member of the city council—I mean, my reputation! But—well, I haven't read the homestead law in some time—but I must say—We need somebody to confer with—somebody who will know—and whom we can trust."

"Barney Foster handles all my affairs," said Sawyer. "If there is anything wrong——"

Carver shook his head. "I'm reluctant to drag the mayor in on this. We might be putting him in an embarrassing position."

"Mr. Carver, I insist on talking with Mr. Foster at once!"

Carver threw up his hand. "All right. He's probably in his office down the street. I'll get him."

While Carver was absent, the lascivious eyes of the man Cook roved her with amused insolence. He unbuttoned his coat and revealed a red-and-white calfskin vest. She shuddered and went to the window and looked out. People below hurried along before the cold wind. On a level with her eyes, over the rooftops and beyond the town, she could see her house, standing on top of the slope.

Foster flung open the door and strode in ahead of Carver. "Is this the man?" he demanded. He took two strides over to Cook. Cook looked up calmly. "Who are you?" asked Foster. "No, don't trouble to answer. I know you. I've seen you around. And what I know about you I don't like."

Cook got up and walked to Carver's desk and dropped his cigarette butt into the spittoon. On the way back to his chair, he smiled: "I don't see how it makes any difference what you like or don't like."

Foster doubled his fists at his sides. Cook reseated himself and looked up at Foster blandly.

"Sawyer?" said Foster. He went to her as she stood with her back to the window, gripping the sill behind her.

"What have I done, Barney?" she pleaded. "What's happening?"

"I don't know yet. Carver gave me the highlights on the way over. Let me see that receipt."

Carver handed it to him. Foster read it and grunted.

"Did you sign this, Sawyer?"

"Not that one."

Foster swung on Cook.

"You've got the original to this?"

"Yep."

"Where is it?"

"Oh, now . . ."

"Where did you get it?"

"Bought it. Paid good cash for it. Five hundred bucks, if you want to know."

"Just so you could come and blackmail this helpless woman!"

"That's a pretty hard word. I only want to——"

"You thought she didn't have friends. But let me tell you something, my fellow, she's *got* friends."

Cook held up his hands. "That's fine. Everybody should have friends."

Foster swung on Carver.

"Got a copy of the homestead law?"

"I think I have. Somewhere." He fumbled through the desk.

"I have one at home," Sawyer offered. "They gave it to me when I got my land. I never read it—the small print——"

"Here we are," said Carver.

Foster's eyes scanned the sheet.

"Bring it here," said Cook.

Impatiently, Foster held it out to him. Cook indicated with a gloved forefinger. "There."

Foster read the paragraph. He whispered a sibilant oath.

"Now look here!" he said. He stood in front of Cook, one fist crumpling the copy of the act. "You're a phony. You're trying to pull a phony deal. You know damn well no court would take this woman's land away from her just because she let some overnight campers——"

"They were there a week, Mr. Mayor."

"—just because she let some campers pay her twenty-five dollars rent."

Cook recrossed his legs. "I've heard different."

"It was too trivial. Too trivial a sum. It——"

"You a lawyer, Mr. Mayor?"

"I know what common sense and plain, simple justice are."

"Well, Mr. Mayor, all I know is the law. If I was you, I'd talk to a lawyer. Maybe you'll see it different then."

"Allen Dunbar?" suggested Sawyer.

"What? Oh, he's out of town," said Foster. "In Guthrie on city business."

"I'd forgotten."

"Besides, Dunbar's just young enough to be so highly ethical that if you have violated the law, Sawyer, he'd probably think you should face the consequences as provided by the act of Congress."

"Oh, no, Barney. He's my friend."

"Yes? But does he impress you as the kind of young man who would let friendship sway him from what he conceived to be his duty?"

"Well . . . he is honest."

"So are we all, I hope. But there comes a time when you have to be reasonable about things—and all he thinks of is what does the letter of the law say. No, much as we all like Allen Dunbar, I'd be afraid of him. Very afraid." He thought for a moment. "Carver, do you suppose we could call in Judge Tanner?"

"We could," said Carver. "If you think it would be fair to Tanner."

"What?"

"Well, there's his reputation. He's a city official and ——"

"Sawyer's land is outside the jurisdiction of the city."

"True enough. But if there has been a violation of the federal law, and he was aware of it and kept silent——"

"I'll chance it. He's a tolerant man. He's only being asked for his opinion—not to do anything wrong. See if you can find him, will you?"

Carver left again. Foster went to Sawyer.

"Barney! You're making me sound like a criminal."

"No, no, Sawyer. Not that. Any incautious person might have done the same. The trouble is, that might not help."

"But I don't understand. What did I do wrong?"

"The homestead law says explicitly that no homestead or any part of it must be rented or any fees collected from rent during the homesteading period. Last November you were still in that period. The law goes on to say that any person who finds a violation in homesteading procedure on any contract may contest the homesteader's title, and if the court agrees that there was a flaw, the contestant himself may have the land."

"No!"

"It's the government's way of getting help in enforcing the homestead laws. And the government is tough about it. This scoundrel possibly may have hit on something that——"

"Just a minute, Mr. Mayor," said Cook quietly. "As of now, I'm willing to be reasonable about this. But if you keep threatening me and calling me names, I can get as hard-boiled as anybody."

Sawyer glared at him. "You detestable—I'd like to slap your face!"

"Go ahead," said Cook. "I'd love it." She thought a profane name, but she changed her expression to one of appeal. "You wouldn't take my home from me, would you?"

"Did I say that? I only came to you saying I wanted to buy some lots. I didn't want to get into all this hurrah. You was the one that sent me here."

"If that's all you want—Barney, let Mr. Carver sell him all he wants."

"Not so fast, Sawyer. This fellow is a sharper——"

"Once more, Mr. Mayor," warned Cook.

"I can only say, Sawyer, that there must be more to this than meets the eye."

Carver returned with Judge Tanner.

Tanner accepted Carver's swivel chair with the dignity of the magistrate about to sit in judgment. Loosely cupping his hands on the knees of his black broadcloth trousers, he pushed his cud of tobacco into his off cheek and said gravely, "Well, Mr. Mayor?"

"I'm not here in my capacity as mayor, Judge Tanner. And I hope you won't consider yourself here in the role of city judge. We would like your advice as if coming from a private attorney."

"I should be happy to be of assistance."

"Let me tell you how matters stand," said Foster. He summarized the situation.

Tanner shifted uneasily.

"Let me see the copy of the law, please."

Foster handed him the crumpled sheet. Tanner smoothed it out on one knee, took gold-rimmed spectacles from his pocket, polished them with a handkerchief, then blew his nose and returned the handkerchief to his pocket. He put the spectacles on, held up the paper and squinted at it, pulled the spectacles low on his nose, and peered over them to read.

Sawyer thought he would never finish his reading. Over and over in her mind turned a dull, "O God, please. O God, please."

"Mmm-hmh!" said Judge Tanner at last. "Now, the receipt."

He read the receipt through carefully, then put the law and the receipt together and laid them on the desk. He removed his spectacles and held them lightly between thumb and forefinger. He frowned.

Sawyer wanted to cry out, "No!"

"Well . . ." he said.

"Just a minute," interrupted Foster. "Cook, we'd like to consider this a private conference. Would you mind stepping out in the hall until we have finished?"

Cook got up. "Just don't be too long. And don't try to flim-flam me. I know my rights."

Carver shut the door behind him.

Foster held up clawlike fingers. "If that blackguard had stayed in this room another minute I'd have had to strangle him." He got control of himself. "Well, Judge?"

"A most lamentable—situation," said Judge Tanner.

"You can't mean I've lost my land!" said Sawyer.

"My girl," said Judge Tanner, "your position—is perilous."

"Now, look, Judge," interrupted Foster. "I can't believe that any court would void Sawyer Tyndall's title just because of a mere twenty-five dollars paid by some campers."

"I find nothing—in the law," said Judge Tanner, his Adam's apple sadly rising and falling with each pause, "which stipulates how much money—must be received—before the penalty clause—becomes operative. The courts—in my opinion—would hold that evidence of one dollar paid—to be as much a violation—as one thousand dollars paid. I regret to say this."

"But I wasn't renting it!" said Sawyer. "I didn't even know they were there—until next morning. I didn't care if they stayed. But I didn't want their money!"

"I know," said Judge Tanner. "I know."

"Do you mean to say a scoundrel like that——" exploded Foster. He threw up his hands without finishing the sentence.

"Granted he's a—scoundrel," said Judge Tanner. "Still—the courts would hardly concern themselves with the character—of the contestant—so long as the evidence clearly showed—the homesteader—had violated the law. The thing is—can the contestant prove the law—was violated? He has the receipt—stating that twenty-five dollars was paid—for one week's rent by six men, their five wagons and teams. If I were sitting—in this case—I should hand down my judgment with great reluctance—but—as it now stands—I could see no alternative. You well know, Mr. Mayor, how many claims hereabouts have already been contested successfully—for less cause. Some men make it a business. Only last week—a contestant secured a title—because the original homesteader—had failed to dig his well—as the law requires."

"But my land isn't just a farm," said Sawyer. "It's a valuable piece of property."

"I'm afraid its value is not relevant. Clearly, the scoundrel—as you rightly call him—knows he has a case."

Foster beat a fist into his palm. "Then I say the law is bad."

Judge Tanner turned his palms upward in a sign of helplessness.

Sawyer's lips trembled.

"Hold on to yourself, Sawyer," said Foster. "You're not licked yet. Call that fellow in, Carver."

Cook sauntered in with a confident smile.

Foster straightened his shoulders and said with dignity: "All right, Mr. Cook, we're ready to hear what it is you want."

"I've told you. I only want to buy some lots."

"How many?"

"I want eight facing half-blocks on the first street on the east side of the tract."

"That would be a total of thirty-two lots. They're selling at \$400 apiece——"

"Is that all?" said Cook airily. "You're not getting enough. I'm in the real estate business myself. I've got clients who'll shell out a thousand bucks a half-lot——"

"What you do is your own affair!" said Foster. "You talk too much."

Cook's eyes flickered to Foster's. The cocky smile wavered. "Maybe so," he mumbled.

"All right," said Foster crisply. "What you want would come to—let's see—\$12,800. Then you'll turn over to Mrs. Tyndall that receipt?"

"Oh, sure."

"Where's your money?"

Cook took out a cigarette. "Now that's the hitch. I ain't got any—not twelve thou' eight hundred anyway."

"Then how do you expect to buy?"

"Well-l-l," he drawled from the corner of his mouth as he lit a cigarette. He studied the match flame for a moment, then blew it out with a jet of smoke. "Me being so big-hearted," he smiled, "when I could cabbage the whole shebang for nothing—I thought maybe Mrs. Tyndall might want to show her appreciation by making me a gift of the eight half-blocks."

"Ah-hunh," grunted Foster. "Now we're beginning to see the colour of your cards."

"It's a good hand, ain't it?"

"There's a joker. Mrs. Tyndall's land is mortgaged. The bank has to clear all sales, because all proceeds go to the bank to reduce the mortgage. They wouldn't let her give the lots away."

"Oh. Well, let's consider it this way. I ain't got the kale. But Mrs. Tyndall's got oodles, ain't she? Suppose she wanted to make me a present of just the sum needed. I'd be able to buy the lots from her and the dough I pay could be turned to the bank against the mortgage."

"Carver, Judge Tanner!" said Foster. "I want you to witness that this man is attempting blackmail."

Cook scowled. "Try that trick on me and I'll walk out of here right now and file my contest."

Judge Tanner rose.

"Mr. Mayor, I'm being put in an embarrassing position. As city judge, I cannot permit myself—to participate—in proposals of collusion."

"Collusion?"

"You are discussing—how a violator of the federal law—excuse me, Sawyer, innocent as your motives may have been—how a violator can avoid the penalty. If I knew how, Sawyer, I would put this man—behind bars—for life. Unfortunately, he has the law—on his side. I must think—of the ethics—of my profession. I have a sense of guilt—just knowing about the situation. I wish you had seen it possible—not to have confided in me—a lawyer sworn—to uphold the law. I will keep my silence—and trust you not to inform anyone that I possess—this guilty knowledge. Good day."

He bowed and went out.

Her face pale with desperation, Sawyer turned to Foster.

"Barney! I don't care if I'm violating ten thousand laws. I don't care about any law. I don't want to lose my home—my land! I can't! I can't! It's all I've got! I'll pay this man anything he wants. Anything! Just make it so he can't take my land!"

"Sawyer," Foster began. He sighed. "I can't advise you to do as this man asks. The judge is right. It amounts to collusion. You musn't do it. It would make you guilty of a criminal offence."

"I don't care."

"If anyone learned of it, you could be sent to the penitentiary."

"You don't understand! My land is all I've got."

"I do understand. And I'll say this: whatever decision you make, I'll stand by you. But you musn't ask Mr. Carver or me to advise you. It's a choice you'll have to make for yourself."

"I don't want any commission from this false sale," said Carver, shrilly. "I wouldn't touch it. I don't want to risk going to prison."

"You won't be put in any such position," said Sawyer. Conscious that she held the centre of the stage, daring where these two quailed, she said nobly, "I'll bear the whole burden myself."

"Sawyer," said Foster respectfully, "you're a brave woman. I don't care if the law would say it's criminal for you to do it—I want you to know I understand. There," he said, pointing a finger at Cook and his voice rising, "stands the real criminal."

"Now listen——" said Cook hotly.

"Don't Barney," said Sawyer. "I just want to get it over with."

"You're the boss, Sawyer," said Foster deferentially.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THREE days later Sawyer, wrapped in a cerise silk kimono brocaded with dragons, was seated at breakfast, when she glanced out the window and saw a good many people at work along the east edge of the land. The activity covered the blocks "purchased" by Ollie Cook. Lumber was being unloaded from wagons, tents were being raised, she could see the arms of carpenters rising and falling. She was glad all windows were closed, so she couldn't hear the hammering. She had risen rather late—it was past ten—and apparently work had been going on over there since early morning. It occurred to her that Cook probably was going to build a double row of houses and offer them for sale. She heartily wished him bad luck.

She was in bad humour, and out of favour with herself. Falling Leaf had served what was probably a good breakfast, but it looked distinctly unappetising. An elbow on the table, her throbbing forehead resting on the palm of her hand, she stirred and sipped her coffee.

After the whist party was over, there hadn't, she reminded herself, been any good reason for not letting Doc Rogers bring her straight home. True, the night had been cold and clear and invited action, and the anxiety over having nearly lost her land still weighed in her, and she had wanted to continue being gay to avoid thinking about it. As they drove away from the Hawks' in Doc's buggy, she had laughingly said—had inexplicably said, it seemed now—"I don't want to go home. The night's young. What's something terribly foolhardy we can do?" How it came about, she wasn't quite clear now, but there they were in his office, she sitting in the dentist's chair, he in a straight chair tilted against the wall, and they were drinking from a bottle of tequila he had hauled from the cabinet. He must have smelled her breath for him to have suggested their going up there in the first place—damn Kit's pocket-book flask!—but he hadn't done anything untoward. He'd been rather dull in fact, talking about dentistry. She had felt very much the incorrigible young widow, being in a man's office at night with the shades drawn, it had all been naughty and fun, and she had been quite witty. He had shown her some colour plate of bridgework, and she had told him she had expected him to produce etchings. Oh, very witty. Let's see—yes, he had kissed her good-night at the front door. Quite a reputation you're going to have, my girl, at the rate you're going. She toyed dejectedly with an egg. Oh well, I only let him kiss me once. Whose business is it, anyway? Doc won't tell anybody about what we did—he's not the kind to boast of his exploits. Or is he?

To escape further self-recrimination, she began mentally turning over her appointments for the day. Mrs. Underwood was coming by at ten-thirty and they were going together to the white sale at Gottlieb's to buy material for summer nightgowns for the children at the Indian mission school. Somehow she would get out of helping with the actual sewing; Mrs. Underwood's dull church circle mainly expected her to furnish the money for the material, she was sure. After finishing with Mrs. Underwood, she would go by Mr. French's and get a copy of *Graustark*, which she had seen reviewed favourably in one of the magazines. After that, perhaps to Vera's to chat with her and try on hats, then to Hogan's for groceries. She wouldn't return home before going to Mrs. Yancey's for luncheon—sure to be a bore, but she was almost obliged to go—she would have Joe bring the carriage to Hogan's at twelve-thirty. Falling Leaf wanted to go and visit her family overnight; since Sawyer wouldn't be home to lunch, and could fix her own light supper, she had given the woman permission to go as soon as she had made the bed and cleaned house. After the luncheon, if it were near enough five, she might drop by for a little visit with Kit before Pen got home—

Oh, for God's sake! she assailed herself. Do you have to have a drink every day? You're going to wind up taking the Keeley cure.

On second thought, better not go by Kit's. This drinking *was* almost getting to be a habit. If it were only possible to visit Kit without being expected to. Well, she never held you and poured it down your throat. No, but— It isn't that I really crave it. Heavens, no! It's just that it makes things gayer, and I'm not tired, or worried about anything then. But, she said to herself firmly, I'm going to quit it. It's something that a lady just shouldn't do.

You've said the same thing before at breakfast. Easy to say at breakfast. Wait till along about five, and then we'll see.

Oh well, a drink with one's best friend can't be the ultimate in sinning.

But that hardly explains the bottle of brandy hidden away from Falling Leaf's eyes at the back of the closet, does it? Just medicinal? You took a pretty big dose when you came home from buying off that filthy bastard in Mr. Carver's office—

Oh, shut up, and stop using language like that. I'm trying to get this egg down. I'm not going to take a single drink to-day. And good heavens, I'll have to fly to be ready for Mrs. Underwood at ten-thirty . . .

Mrs. Underwood, whose chief virtue was punctuality, hadn't arrived at ten-thirty. By eleven, Sawyer decided she had forgotten the appointment; she had Joe bring around her own carriage.

As she drove off, she again noticed the mounting activity at the east

edge of her tract. The scene resembled in miniature the opening day of the townsite. Thinking back later, she realised she had vaguely thought that very fact strange: people didn't set up tents these days, and the frame outlines of the buildings shouldn't have been plain rectangles, but should have had the irregular shapes of houses—if, indeed, houses would have been so far along in so short a time. But, as she gave it no more than a glance, her mind, such of it as was functioning clearly, was only slightly stirred.

Entering Gottlieb's Mercantile, she was certain Mr. Gottlieb, who always waited on her himself, saw her. But she must have been mistaken, for he turned away and disappeared behind the door of his office.

The women at the piece-goods counter made a way for her; she was used to deference from ordinary housewives, though there was something strange—hadn't they all fallen silent? The girl who tried to wait on her was undoubtedly an idiot, she giggled so, and couldn't display anything properly, and talked incoherently, until Sawyer impatiently walked out of the store.

She started up the street toward the bookstore. She heard her name spoken at her shoulder, and turned. It was the Reverend Mr. Bradford. His thin face bore an unusually haughty, pious expression. He took a document from his coat pocket.

"Mrs. Tyndall," he said, "permit me to return the deed to the lots you gave my church for a site."

Sawyer automatically accepted the paper he held out, but, puzzled, she said, "Why are you returning it? I want you to have it."

"There's hardly any need to discuss it." He curtly tipped his hat. "You must excuse me."

He walked away, leaving her staring after him. She noticed that a number of pedestrians had paused to overhear the conversation, and now seemed to be watching her to see what her reaction would be. She had opened her pocket-book to put the deed in it, when a small boy came up to her, rather breathless.

"I've got a note for you, Mrs. Tyndall," he said. "From Mrs. Yancey."

She opened the envelope. It was brief. Mrs. Yancey regretted that due to circumstances unforeseen she would not be able to have Mrs. Tyndall at luncheon. Odd sort of statement.

"Tell Mrs. Yancey——" she said uncertainly, then, aware that a number of people apart had their ears cocked, she hesitated, very much puzzled.

A carriage drew up alongside the kerb. Sawyer recognised its occupant—the Mrs. Williams whose husband ran the grain elevator, and who had already started construction of a house in her sub-division.

Mrs. Williams, who was a short, bosomy woman of middle-age, stood

up in her carriage, wrath contorting her dumpy face.

"How dare you!" she shrilled. "You give us our money back! We'll sue you for all you're worth. You—you——"

"Mrs. Williams!" said Sawyer in dismay. Now the pedestrians had given up all pretence of not watching. They drew closer about.

"Don't you Mrs. Williams me. Don't you even speak to me. Of all the low-down, fraudulent schemes——"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't deny it. Everybody knows it. We might have known, with your background, the kind of life you lived, that we'd be taken in. Oh, what fools we were to accept you, to give you a chance——"

"Listen——"

"I refuse to dirty myself by talking in public with you. But we want our money back, do you hear? Our money back!" She shook a pudgy fist.

The act stirred Sawyer's temper. "If you don't tell me what's the matter with you——"

"Saloons!" cried Mrs. Williams. "Dance halls, gambling dives, bad women—all of them, moving out to that neighbourhood where you tricked us into buying a lot. You're one of them. It's the kind you came from—just like your husband was—if he was your husband. You—bad woman!"

She drove off.

The woman's insane, whispered Sawyer. She went swiftly to her own carriage and told Joe to drive out to her land.

Entering the street where the construction was under way, she realised with horror that Mrs. Williams was right. Men were wrestling a long mahogany bar out of a wagon, roulette tables were being carried into a tent, and a sign reading "Hanley's Dance Hall" was lying on the ground.

She saw Ollie Cook in front of the frame skeleton of a rectangular building. She got down and swept to him in a fury.

"What does all this mean?" she demanded.

He shrugged and turned away.

"You listen to me! You can't put places like this on my land."

"You sold this part, didn't you?"

"But not to be used for this purpose. There are supposed to be residences."

"I don't recall there was any mention of what purpose it would be used for."

"But—it's generally understood. Everybody knows——!" His smile infuriated her. "I insist that all this be stopped at once," she shouted.

"Lady," said a quiet voice. She swung on a red-complexioned man in

a striped suit. "If you're going to make a disturbance," he said. "I'll have to ask you to be leaving!"

"Who are you to order me about?"

"The name's Timothy O'Reilly and I'm the owner of the Red Barrel saloon which is located on this lot of mine you're standing on. It's a quiet place I run and if you're going to be a trouble maker I'll ask you to kindly remove yourself now."

"I'll show you!" cried Sawyer. Picking up her skirt, she marched to her carriage.

Joe started to drive her back to town but he saw his aunt signalling from the front steps of the house and drove over there.

"Money men in devil wagon come," said Falling Leaf. She had on one of Sawyer's discarded hats and carried her pocket-book. "Say want to see you bad. Pretty crazy men."

"Very well," said Sawyer.

"Boy come too with letter."

"I saw the boy. Take me to the mayor's office, Joe."

"Barney!"

She closed the door of his office and leaned against it. Barney had been standing at the window. He came to her and led her to the deep leather sofa. He sat in a leather chair opposite her.

"The Thurston brothers! Down in the street just now. They were like madmen. I've never had anyone talk to me like that."

"I saw from the window what was going on," said Foster. "I was starting to come down."

"All the people gathered around listening. Barney, do you know what's happened?"

"Yes."

"The Thurstons—they've always been so considerate. Every time I go into their bank, they get up and bow and shake my hand and— You say you do know what's happened?"

"I think everybody does."

"Yes, everybody! But how did they learn so fast? I didn't know about it myself until an hour ago."

"The vice crowd themselves started the rumour; they were spreading it about early this morning, and news like that travels like lightning."

"It's horrible! It's got to be stopped! Everybody thinks I sold them the land for that purpose. Even the Thurston brothers——"

"Did you deny it?"

"They didn't give me a chance to get a word in edgewise. Their engine was making so much racket I couldn't hear half of what *they* were shouting. Do you mean the gamblers and saloon-keepers and so on told people I sold them site for their places?"

"Yes."

"But why would they do that? I've never done anything to them."

"They are shrewd operators. They've had one experience with what an aroused mob can do—at the time the young Dunbar boy was hurt. If the townspeople thought those folks had tricked you, and had got their new locations through a fraud imposed on a widow, they might form a mob and go out there and clean them out."

"But they *did* do that. That Ollie Cook. I'll tell people they did."

"Let's consider the matter first," said Foster. He went to the water cooler and ran a tumbler of water and brought it to her. She waved it away; he drank it himself. Re-seating himself, he toyed with the diamond solitaire on his little finger. "I must confess, Sawyer, that I learned yesterday what was afoot."

"You did? Why didn't you come and tell me?"

Foster spread his hands helplessly. "That Cook fellow came to me yesterday—came to this office. My first impulse was to kick him out. After I heard what he had to say, I found that I was tied hand and foot."

"What could he possibly have said?"

Foster sighed. "You see, it is now the law of the council that those places cannot do business within the city limits. That's why they had to move. So they move out to your land. But it is known that we expect to annex your sub-division sometime soon and bring it inside the limits. That would again subject them to the town laws, and they would have to move out of there."

Sawyer got to her feet. "That's what you can do then. Bring me inside the city and that will get rid of them."

"Sit down, Sawyer, please. Now look, this is very difficult for me to say. Cook came here for the express purpose—those crooks are very cunning and they think of all the possibilities—he came here for the express purpose of warning me not to bring your land into the town. Not for several months anyway, until they have had a chance to complete their clean-up and are ready to move on of their own accord."

"But, Barney, you don't have to obey him, do you?"

"Sawyer——" He hesitated. He got to his feet in a manner which suggested impatience with himself. He paced the length of the office, hands behind his back, then reseated himself. Desperately, he ran a hand over his tight black-and-silver curls.

"Sawyer," he said, "granted I can pretty well control the council. If I say your land is *not* to be brought in it probably won't be."

"But you wouldn't say that—if bringing it in meant I would be rescued from those people."

"Let me tell you what Cook said. It was bitter to have to listen to it.

I wanted to kill him! He said that if we voted in that tract before he's ready for it, he would expose to the federal authorities that you—and I—and Mr. Carver—entered into a criminal collusion to keep you from forfeiting your land for a violation of the law."

"But he couldn't prove we did that. You know he gave us the receipt when we paid him the money and we tore it up."

"He knows the men you signed the receipt for. He says he can produce them as witnesses if he's forced to. I've no doubt he can. They were probably planted henchmen of his in the first place. Add their testimony to his as to what we did, plus the indisputable fact that you *did* let him have the land, and—well, our chances wouldn't be any too good."

"But Barney," said Sawyer desperately, "the whole thing was so trivial to begin with. They only paid me twenty-five dollars for camping one week."

Foster smiled bitterly. "It wasn't much, but as we saw, under the law it meant that you had forfeited the right to your homestead. But that's not the important thing now. The important thing is, to save yourself—and remember, I told you the consequences might be grave and I advised you not to do it—you paid Cook a bribe of \$12,800."

"Don't put it that way."

Foster shook his head reluctantly. "How else can I put it? That's what the courts would say it was. And what would you say when the district attorney asked you, in front of the jury, 'Aren't you the widow of a confidence man——'?"

"Barney, please!"

"I don't mean to be cruel, but you did pay Cook a bribe of \$12,800 to keep his mouth shut about your original—well, wrongdoing. Didn't you?"

"Well——"

"And when you did that—oh, I won't say *you* did it—I won't try to escape my part of the responsibility—I was there and let you do it—and so was Mr. Carver—I feel as sorry for him as I do for you and me—he's so conscientious and hard-working and trying to make a success of his business—when we all three did what we did, we became what the courts would hold to be a conspiracy of criminals, fit for the penitentiary."

Sawyer clutched her muff. "Don't, Barney."

"I don't know what to say, Sawyer. I lay awake all night fretting about it. To defy Cook means that we expose ourselves to the dangers of prison, and to the complete forfeiture of your land. I've done everything possible to establish a reputation here for honesty, forthrightness, square dealing. I like being mayor of this town. I'm only beginning

to incorporate my ideas of good, progressive government. To have all that endangered, to find myself in peril of being branded a conspirator, a bribe-giver—a criminal—I can't tell you how it has sickened me."

He buried his face in his hands.

Sawyer stared at him. "Barney!" she pleaded.

He straightened. "Oh, I shouldn't give way like this. I'll do whatever you say, Sawyer. It's dreadful to be craven before the dictates of sharpers, but——"

"Everything you've done—whether it was wrong or not—you did out of generosity and friendship for me," said Sawyer. "I know that. No matter what happens to me or my affairs, I'll not let you be harmed. No matter what, you and Mr. Carver must be protected."

"But not at your expense, Sawyer. I couldn't do that."

"I can't put money ahead of friendship. I suppose it's true—as the Thurston brothers screamed at me—that nobody will buy my lots now. I suppose it's true they will foreclose and I'll lose the land anyway. But I'd sacrifice all that, gladly, to shield you from harm you don't deserve."

"You are a saintly woman, Sawyer," said Foster. "The saintliest I've ever known."

Tears misted her eyes. "I can't help it, though, I can't bear the thought of losing my home and of being penniless."

"Oh, you won't lose your home, Sawyer, and you won't be penniless."

"What?"

"If that's all that's worrying you, forget it."

"Why won't I lose everything? The Thurston brothers said——"

"They may lose, true. But you see, you've already drawn most of your \$81,000 loan. That's a great deal of money."

"But I don't have much of it."

"It's soundly invested, though. As a matter of fact," getting up and going to his desk, "you received a dividend on your steel stock yesterday. I was going to bring it out to you."

He unlocked a drawer and took out a black tin box. With another key on his ring he unlocked the tin box and withdrew a packet of bills of large denomination.

"Here it is—\$2,000. And this is only a small part of the return you soon will be getting on your investments. You're wealthy—wealthier than ever before. Here, take it."

Carefully, she put the money in her pocket-book.

"And," said Foster, reseating himself, "so far as the bank's foreclosing is concerned, you should be in a position by August, when the mortgage falls due, to make a substantial payment, and on the evidence that you will soon be able to pay it all off, plus a very considerable amount

of interest due them, I think they will see the light. Anyway, your house and its grounds aren't included in the mortgage. They can't touch that. No, it's not your financial status that bothers me."

"What else matters?" She breathed a sigh of relief. "Oh, I was so frightened at first—I was insane. Why did you let me be so frightened?"

"I am concerned about your social position in town. How will people act toward you now?"

"The Reverend Bradford came up to me this morning and very insultingly gave me back the church deed. Mrs. Yancey cancelled an invitation to luncheon. Oh! I guess that's why Mrs. Underwood didn't keep our appointment. Mrs. Williams shouted and shook her fist at me. Why," she said, with astonishment, "there have been so *many*! And the Thurston brothers besides."

Foster pursed his lips. "I'm afraid those are only samples of what you can expect."

"Oh well, I can stand it if just those people—they aren't my style anyway!"

"Sawyer, you remember I told you back in El Reno that these people are by nature very conservative, biased, and small-minded."

"God knows they are!"

"I told you there would quickly come a time when they demanded that everybody conform to their pattern. These last few weeks you've been riding pretty high and handsome, haven't you?"

"Well, why not?"

"They've become a little suspicious of you already—those so-called 'backbone people' of the community. They were already beginning to wonder a little, if after all, with your background——"

"But this is supposed to be a country where your past doesn't count—it's supposed to be forgotten."

"They're willing to forget your past—as long as you behave in the present exactly as they do. Now, because of what has happened to-day, they'll make use of the past to reinforce their self-righteousness."

"Mrs. Williams already has. She called me—names. The old fraud. Why, my social position is twice what hers is——"

"Was."

"What?"

"I said, was. Your social position, as we call it, was manufactured by consent. I'm afraid that now—and this is what hurts me most—you'll practically be ostracised."

"Ostracised!!"

"Yes."

"Not by *my* friends. Why, they——"

Barney shook his head. "They can't afford you now. But," he said,

suddenly harsh, "what can you expect? You can't expect to ride roughshod over people, taking just what you want, and ignoring what they might want and desire, and not expect them to retaliate, can you?"

"Who have I done that to?"

His cold eyes told her—he meant that he, himself, was one she had rebuffed. She flushed.

"Don't be mean to me, Barney."

His thinned lips softened to a smile. "I wouldn't think of being mean to you. I'm only preparing you for what you'll have to face. You see, no matter what people say or do to you, you can't—you simply can't—deny that you knew what you were selling those lots for. And when you admit it, you're done for in the 'social life' of this town. You can still have your money, and your beautiful house, but you'll keep them at the expense of the friendship of the smug, self-satisfied nincompoops of this burg. Will you pay that price?"

Sawyer's hands closed on her bulging pocket-book. "Gladly! I don't give two hoots in hell what they think—if that's the kind they are. I'm above them. They're dirt to me. Let them gossip and whisper. I'm used to it. I don't even have to live here. I've got the money. I can move away if I want to."

"Sure."

She got to her feet. "But I won't. I'll show 'em. They can't *drive* me away."

Before he opened the door for her, he said, "Just remember, Sawyer, never, to anyone, must you hint what you really did—if you value what you have."

"If only I were concerned," she said, with a certain grandeur, "I wouldn't care who knew it. But I'll not betray your friendship, Barney. You may be sure, nobody will ever know."

He nodded, opened the door, and she swept out and went down the stairs.

As she crossed the sidewalk to her carriage, she was confronted by three women shoppers. She knew them—they belonged to afternoon clubs—and she had always especially detested the simpering manner of the one named Mrs. Brice who had now begun saying, mincingly, shifting a package from one arm to the other, "You mustn't pay attention to what people are whispering, dear—common people. People like that are so often wrong. *We* don't believe a word of it, do we, ladies?" Broad, negative head-shakings by the other two women. "And if there's *anything* you want to tell us about it, we wouldn't whisper a word to a soul."

Several loafers standing in front of Horner's Drugstore tried to suppress guffaws.

Sawyer was about to deliver a caustic reply when she saw Cecilia Trevaine come out of the drugstore.

"Oh, but ladies," said Sawyer airily, "didn't you know I own a half-interest in all the saloons and dance halls? I wanted them out where I can keep an eye on them. Oh, there's my good friend who manages my houses of ill-fame. Cecilia! Oh, Cecilia!"

Cecilia Trevaine halted; she stood hesitant, belligerent and curious, beneath her great plumed Gainsborough hat.

"Well?"

"Won't you come out and have a cup of tea with me?"

"Who? Me?"

"I'm just on my way home. I'd love having you."

"Why, Sawyer!" Cecilia billowed over to her with a magnificent swishing of silk underskirts.

Sawyer indicated that Cecilia should precede her into the carriage. As she got up herself, Sawyer turned to the three women on the walk.

"You'd better close your mouths, ladies," she said sweetly. "A fly might fly in."

At that, the drugstore loafers let go with their guffaws.

When Sawyer reached home with the flattered and expectant Cecilia, there seemed to be no other choice except to carry through with her invitation. Cecilia was eager to see the house; Sawyer showed it to her, finding no consolation in Cecilia's repeated, "Gee, this is hunkydory in aces." As they passed through the rooms, Sawyer let a trembling hand caress a table, a statuette, a chair's upholstery. They were solid and real; possessing them, couldn't she let opinion go hang? Weak with fright and fury, she kept up an airy chatter to show Cecilia she had not a care.

As they left a guest bedroom, Sawyer hesitated, then resolutely turned back into the room. She got out a bottle from the back of the closet. "I know you like brandy," she said. "I heard you tell someone so one night."

"When was that, hon?"

"I was outside your dressing tent. You went in with one of your dancers and told your dwarf you were going to have a drink of brandy." They started down the stairs.

"Sweet Jesus, hon, why didn't you join us?"

"Oh, I was pretending to be too innocent and oh too demure to drink then," said Sawyer lightly.

Cecilia laughed at the joke and they settled themselves in the parlour. Sawyer poured them each a drink. She tossed hers off and poured another. She got up suddenly and walked the length of the room, drank the brandy swiftly and returned to the bottle and refilled her glass.

"Better go easy on that grape," said Cecilia. "It'll slug you like Jim Jeffries' right."

"I know what I'm doing," said Sawyer belligerently. Standing by the table, she emptied the glass.

"Sure, I guess you ought to know what you can handle, and it ain't a guest's place to comment on the lady of the house. Well, hon," said Cecilia, holding up her glass to the window light and examining its colour. "I've glimmered your place out here and I've seen you around, but I never thought I'd be sittin' here swillin' the slop with you."

"Why not?" demanded Sawyer.

"Jesus, the airs you been puttin' on. High sassiety. Milady of the mazuma. Sellin' the elite pup."

"Why shouldn't I?" said Sawyer sharply. "Anybody's business?"

"Here's at you," said Cecilia, and she tossed off her drink. "It's a game I couldn't run with a gaff, and I got to hand my admiration to you for puttin' it over."

"Yes, I put it over," said Sawyer sarcastically. She poured drinks for them both. "They all told me to-day how I put it over." She studied her glass. When would the brandy begin driving the terror out? She drank it down, and closed her eyes against her burning throat. "A con man's moll, that's what you called me. Yes," she said, "stewing it for the gillipins."

Cecilia threw back her head and laughed. "Hon, you've got the words but you ain't got the music. You've been playing the la-dee-da too long." She shook so with laughter, she spilled a little liquor on her dress and had to wipe it with her handkerchief while she drank the remainder.

Sawyer poured their glasses full again. Her hand was unsteady and the bottle rattled against the glass top of the table as she put it down. Sitting on the sofa, she leaned forward and scowled at a group of miniature framed silhouettes on the opposite wall. "All the so-called respectable—the oh so respectable people, they've had their private opinion about me all along, haven't they? Everybody in town."

"I suppose. But you've been puttin' it over so, things is kind of free and easy here, and then you had the rocks—and dough can make folks do a lot of forgettin'."

"Yes, and I've got the rocks," said Sawyer viciously. She drank half her glass, then abruptly got up and went to a window. She pulled back the curtain and looked across at the honkytonks going up. "The bastards," she muttered. "Oh, the bastards."

Cecilia stirred in her chair uneasily. "You sure you ain't sore at me on account of all them dumps being hauled out here?"

"Why should I be sore at you?" said Sawyer coldly. "You didn't have anything to do with it, did you?"

"Not a thing. I swear it. I'm just a workin' lady. I understood you knew what you was doin'."

"Sure," said Sawyer. "I knew all along." She went back to the bottle.

"That's the word I had. But—I wouldn't want 'em near *my* house—not if it was like this one."

"You wouldn't be a snob, would you?"

"Well-l-l . . ."

"Neither would I. Why shouldn't Sawyer Bolton Tyndall, the con man's moll, pick her own kind of neighbours?" She lifted the filled glass.

"Say, you're sure hittin' that hard."

Sawyer whirled on her. "It's my own business, isn't it?"

"All right, hon. It's just a case of whether you want to get stinking."

"I want to get drunk, do you understand?" cried Sawyer. "Drunk—so drunk that I can't think. And I'm feeling it now and I'm still thinking and I don't want to think about anything." She took two swallows and choked.

Cecilia shrugged. "Me too," she said, holding out her glass.

"They talked about everybody having a new chance!" said Sawyer, pouring for Cecilia. "They didn't mean it. They don't want to change. They just wanted to go along being like they always were. And when somebody comes along who *has* a chance to rise above herself, what do they do? *I'll* tell you what they do," she said, her head high, her eyes narrow. "They wait and wait until the opportunity comes and they pull her down. Oh, I'm sick of them. I'm sick of the whole damn kit and kaboodle of them." She sank to the sofa. "Do you think I care. I don't care at all." Tears appeared in her eyes and she brushed them away with a shaking hand. "I'm not any good," she said piteously. "I know I'm not. I have bad thoughts and I do bad things. But I tried to be good." She sobbed. "They want me to be bad."

"I know how you feel," said Cecilia sympathetically. She blew her nose. "I came of a wealthy family—I know what it's like to have life turn against you."

Sawyer, her head lowered, peered up at Cecilia. "You're a liar," she said surlily.

"What?" said Cecilia.

"You didn't come of any wealthy family. You never saw New York. You're not any better than I am."

Cecilia swallowed. "All right, kiddo. Now that you ain't tryin' to pull no flim-flam on me, I can't let that flim-flam I pulled on you stand. Maybe that night I was jealous of you and was tryin' to impress you I'd been pretty high up there myself. I don't know, but look, I'm a Irish-Swede from Minneapolis!"

Sawyer had become too engrossed with the misery of her own self-pity to listen. She quit trying to control her weeping; she *wanted* the tears to flow.

"I never been east of Detroit," said Cecilia.

"I hid in an alley behind a vinegar works one night," said Sawyer, her wet eyes focussed distantly. "A policeman was after me."

"I don't care what you've done," said Cecilia. "I can take anything you ever done and double it in spades."

"My father was cruel to me, that's what started it," sobbed Sawyer. She thought her lungs would burst from the suffering. "If he had been a good father I wouldn't have run off with a gambler."

"That ain't nothing," said Cecilia. "My old man boozed himself to death, and I let a man have it when I was eleven years old."

Sawyer twisted on the sofa and sobbed into the down cushion. "My mother ran off with a man who probably was my father. I was in the room with them."

"That ain't nothin'," insisted Cecilia. "My old lady run a roomin' house and serviced the roomers when she needed the dough. I know, 'cause I clocked her through keyholes many's the time. So you see? Beat that."

"A detective made us pack and said we were tin horns and made us leave town."

"Christ, that wasn't nothin'."

"It was *too* something!" wailed Sawyer. "You just be still!"

"Look, hon," said Cecilia, getting to her feet; she swayed, and said with surprise, "This stuff's got a wallop." She refilled her glass at the table. "You got to stop crying. You need a drink." She knelt beside the prone Sawyer and held the glass to her lips.

"Oh, go away!" Pushed, Cecilia sat down. Sawyer straightened up. "What are you sitting there for?" she demanded.

"I was trying to give you a drink and you pushed me," said Cecilia resentfully.

"I didn't push you. You ought to tell the truth," said Sawyer reprovingly.

"You pushed me," insisted Cecilia, getting to her feet.

Sawyer sat blankly on the sofa and vaguely ran her fingers over her mussed hair. Gazing uncertainly at the bottle, she said, "Where's my glass?"

"Oh say!" said Cecilia. She went to a front window. "There's some of my girls. In a hack. Come out to look over their new cribs, I guess."

"Where's my glass?"

"I bet them soiled doves' eyeballs would pop out if they knew I was sittin' in Sawyer Tyndall's parlour."

Sawyer waved an arm. "Tell 'em to come in."

"Who?"

"Whoever it is you're talking to," mumbled Sawyer. "Tell 'em to come in and see how they won't. There won't *anybody* come to see me again. Tell 'em to come in and have some brandy—that'll shock the old hens."

"There ain't enough. It's almost gone. Got more?"

Sawyer tried to shake her head, but her neck limbered and let her head drop down.

"Well, in an elegant parlour like this, they'd get a kick out of drinking tea."

Sawyer lifted her head with a jerk. "Tea?"

"Sure," said Cecilia, "like ladies. Everybody likes to pretend, don't they?"

"Pretend we're ladies," said Sawyer. "I'm very good at it!" She tried to get up, lost her balance, and made it the second try. "I'll fix the tea."

"Well, one thing," said Cecilia, hiding the bottle behind the piano and following Sawyer as far as the hall, "they'll stand by you, because they've been through it." Cecilia went out on the front porch, put two fingers between her lips, whistled shrilly, and beckoned the hack loaded with girls to drive over.

Somehow getting the idea that she would need her entire set of new Limoges china, Sawyer got down every piece and arrayed it on the kitchen counter. "Now!" she said, a thoughtful forefinger on her cheek. "Oh, water."

When she had the water on, Sawyer wandered back to the parlour. A number of young women in bright silks and satins whose identities she couldn't at the moment place were sitting around her parlour. They had been chattering animatedly, but when she entered they fell silent and stared.

"Who are you?" Sawyer asked pugnaciously.

Cecilia came to her swiftly. "They love it," she whispered in Sawyer's ear.

Sawyer sank to a sofa occupied by a thin, black-haired girl in a hat covered with red and yellow feathers. As she sat, she pushed away her pocket-book, which she had left there. Vaguely, it occurred to her the pocket-book was not as bulky as it should have been. She fumbled it open.

"My money's not here," she said puzzled.

Cecilia said harshly, "How much was it?"

"Two thousand dollars—I think."

There was a chorus of exclamations.

Cecilia planted herself in front of the thin, black-haired girl. "Cough up, Violet."

"Whatever can you mean?" asked Violet.

"Cough up before I kick your ass off," said Cecilia. Violet took a roll of bills from her muff. "Just a practical yoke," she said; "I was going to give it back."

Cecilia snatched the roll and stuffed it into Sawyer's pocket-book. "Apologies of the house," she said. "Some people don't know how to act."

"I—I—" said Sawyer. She got to her feet. "What was I going to do?"

"Tea," said Cecilia. "What's that hack stopping in front?"

"Oh, yes, tea," said Sawyer; she started out to the kitchen, bumped a chair and veered away from it.

Footsteps hit heavily across the porch, the front door was thrown open violently, and Allen Dunbar appeared in the parlour archway. His suit was rumpled from travelling and the expression on his face was a mixture of disbelief and anger. But in the seconds that his eyes took in Sawyer, walking unsteadily toward the archway, and then the women in the room, his expression changed to blank incredulity. Sawyer swayed past him with a muttered, "Come in, everybody," and disappeared into the dining room beyond the hall.

"What are you people doing here?" demanded Allen.

"We're having tea," said Cecilia, drawing herself up defiantly, one hand on the piano. "We were asked to tea."

Allen turned and followed Sawyer.

When Allen appeared in the kitchen doorway, Sawyer, starting to put cups into saucers, realised it was Allen she had passed in the hall. She felt a sudden elation. Tormented by shock and despondency, she dimly knew she had been sinking into ruin, but had no idea how to save herself. Allen had come to rescue her . . .

But what was he shouting?

"What in the name of all that's holy have you done?"

"What?" She steadied herself against the counter.

"I work for six months to rid the town of its lice! When I got off the train and they told me you had brought them all out here I wouldn't believe it!"

"I can't understand you," she protested. "Be quiet and talk plainer."

"I saw them with my own eyes! You've brought them out—the whole rotten gang—to roost on your land! You——"

"Allen, stop shouting."

"Still I couldn't really believe it until I saw your parlour overrun with harlots—drinking tea!"

"They are not!" she said hotly. "I haven't served it yet."

"And drunk! You're drunk besides. What kind of two-faced woman are you?"

She picked up a cup and threw it at him. It shattered against the wall behind him.

"Just what I'd expect of a friend of Barney Foster's," he said with icy calm. "If not more than friend."

"Why, you—foul——"

"I didn't mean to say that," he exclaimed hastily.

Weeping, she cried, "Get out of my house!"

"Sawyer——"

"Get out!" she screamed. "Do you hear me? Oh, God damn you, get out!"

Impatiently, she gouged her eyes to wipe away the tears. When she opened them, he was gone. She stood and looked at the doorway vacantly.

Cecilia Trevaine appeared there, the other women behind her.

"What happened?" said Cecilia, smiling.

Sawyer's mouth twisted to an ugly snarl. "You get out of here, too," she said. "All of you!" She advanced on them bellicosely. "This is my house. You get out of my house too!"

They withdrew in haste, backing through the dining room into the hall. "I never want to see any of you again," she said in a rough whisper. "Get out."

"Well!" said one of the girls as they went down the front steps. "You'd think she'd know how to act like a lady."

Cecilia turned at the edge of the porch and opened her mouth to speak.

"Don't say a word!" shouted Sawyer, clinging to the side of the doorway. "You—tattooed beast!"

Cecilia's shoulders sagged. "Oh, screw you," she said wearily.

Sawyer banged the door. She stumbled up the stairs and fell across the bed.

There was a sound of voices somewhere. Downstairs. Dark. She sat up, nauseated by the smell in her nostrils, and felt her way to the banister at the head of the stairs. Somebody had lighted a lamp in the hall below.

"Who is it?"

"Is this Madam Tyndall's house of call?"

Pat Pendleton's cheery, bantering voice. Responding laughter by others.

Her head drooped.

"Go away."

Kit Pendleton appeared at the foot of the stairs. She started up.

"I don't want you to come up here."

"It hardly matters whether you do or not," said Kit crisply. "I'm coming up. I should have been here sooner. No," she said, turning at the landing, "the rest of you stay down there."

Sawyer glimpsed Pen, Doc Rogers, Sam McCall, and Vera Grady clustered at the foot of the stairs. She drew back . . .

She sat numbly on the chaise lounge while Kit lighted a lamp and swiftly changed the bedsheets. She allowed Kit to take her to the bathroom, unbutton her waist, and wash her face and arms. The cold water revived her a little, and she was able to help Kit get her into fresh clothing.

"This isn't right, for you to do this," Sawyer whimpered.

"Hold up your chin." Kit jerked the collar to and unbuttoned it. "I'm an expert. I've had to undress Pen and put him to bed enough times."

"Just give me a nightgown," begged Sawyer. "I just want to go to bed and never wake up."

"Nonsense," said Kit. "Where's F.L.?"

"She's not here. She's visiting her family. Why did you come?"

"We'd have been here sooner, but when I heard it I insisted it was a joke of some kind. A hack driver has even started a story that you entertained some prostitutes out here this afternoon."

"I think I did."

"Oh, Sawyer. You've been doing it up right, haven't you?"

"Condemn me."

"Condemn you? I envy you. It's something I wish I had thought of. Imagine, trollops to tea. What fun!" she said grimly. "Well, come on."

They got as far as the head of the stairs when Sawyer balked. "I just can't. I can't face them down there." She turned and walked back to her bedroom.

She heard Kit descending the stairs, and presently, returning. She huddled on the chaise longue at the far end of the room.

"Will you see Pen?" asked Kit, standing in the doorway.

"Why?"

"He wants to talk with you. If you wish, we'll go down the back stairs to your sewing room. You needn't see the others."

Kit left her in the sewing room and went for Pen. Sawyer dully sat sideways in the straight chair before the sewing machine. On the cutting table was a tissue pattern pinned to a piece of blue taffeta—the petticoat she had been making the day before to wear with her new blue lace evening gown to the St. Valentine's Ball. Her lip quivered . . . who would dance with her now?

"Well, I'm surprised," said Pen as he lumbered into the room. "The

way you're hiding out, I thought you must have sprouted horns." She didn't look up; she knew his full, ruddy face was grinning and friendly, as always. He pushed back the taffeta and put his weight carefully to the edge of the cutting table. She waited, studying his swinging foot. "Your lower lip pushed out like that is repulsive," he said, lighting a Between-the-Acts cigar. She pulled her lip in.

Pen twirled the match to extinguish it and took a deep drag on the little cigar. "There's one thing they're saying, Sawyer, that I want to hear you say yourself before I'll believe it."

"Whether I knew what was going to be built on those eight blocks when I sold them?"

"Yes."

"I knew." There was a little silence. "Now you're ready to go home."

"I—still don't believe it," said Pen.

"Why not?"

"If for no other reason, Slim Carver isn't such a simpleton that he wouldn't know such a sale would ruin all your lot values——"

"Mr. Carver," said Sawyer, "knew nothing about it. I handled this sale myself."

"But the bank——"

"I think they'll tell you they only knew a man named Ollie Cook wanted to buy them for cash."

"But don't they make any investigation of these sales?"

"Everybody assumes residences will be built."

"Did you assume Cook would build residences?"

"I told you, Pen, I knew what would be built."

Pen winced. "You probably don't know much about business, Sawyer, but I can't believe you could be that stupid."

How long could she engage in this parrying and him she wondered. "It's an awfully big tract, this hundred and sixty acres. Whole towns have been built on less. There should be room for everybody."

"I don't get it, Sawyer. I came out here expecting you to deny it. I just don't get it."

"So you're ready to go home. I don't blame you. It would hurt your business to associate with somebody like me. You shouldn't even be alone with a woman like me—it's dangerous."

"Oh, cut it out," said Pen impatiently. "If you were a vicious or malicious person, and did this, it would be one thing. But you're a grand girl—I know darn well you are, and——"

"Is Allen Dunbar a grand person?"

"Allen?"

"He was here this afternoon," said Sawyer, and the memory of it stirred an anger that lifted her momentarily from her apathy.

"I know he was," said Pen. "But you must remember, Sawyer, that Allen's one objective has been to clear these people out. He's stunned—and he's very bitter about this afternoon. Can you blame him altogether?"

"Can't I?"

"Take Dick Robinson. I was talking with him an hour ago——"

"Asking him to come out with you?"

"Well—Dick fought that crowd tooth and nail. He thinks you double-crossed him."

"I don't care what he thinks."

He hesitated. "You're a pretty badly hurt kid, aren't you?"

"I'm not hurt," she said, intently toying with the balance wheel of the sewing machine. "I have no character, that's the whole trouble."

He smiled. "Sawyer, don't you think that all of us, when we've done something—maybe we shouldn't have, we like to tell ourselves nobody could be as bad as we are? Maybe we sort of enjoy kicking ourselves around, hunh? Maybe if we can persuade ourselves we've behaved in the worst way anybody ever possibly could have, why, that at least makes us unique and secretly sets us up with a kind of importance?"

She looked at him quickly. His pale blue eyes were shrewd behind his curling red lashes. "Hit anywhere close?" he asked.

She looked back at the nickel wheel. "You and Kit are decent and honest," she insisted. "You shouldn't be mixed up with somebody like me."

He vexedly scratched his red hair. "Me too decent and honest to claim you as a friend. Maybe it's the other way around. Listen, I'm going to tell you something I'd hate very, very much for this town to know. Do you know why I'm living in this town—why Kit and I are?"

"I've wondered."

"Well, first of all, Kit—she's never done anything wrong, either? She's told you she was divorced once."

"Yes."

"And I suppose she told you why."

"No."

"Anyway, after we were married, we liked to have fun, we liked to live on a higher scale than I could afford—I was an assistant cashier in a Baltimore bank—Kit liked expensive clothes and I liked to see her wear 'em, and I liked to play the horses because—well, because I did. You can see what's coming, can't you?"

"Are you going to tell me you stole money from the bank?"

"Yep."

"I don't believe it. Not you, Pen."

"It's such a common story—I might have at least been more original."

Fortunately, I had an uncle with quite a heft of kale and he repaid the losses and got it squared. On condition," he said lightly, "that I decamped the Baltimore beloved of Kit and me."

"I'm sorry, Pen."

He waved it off. "We're doing all right. The point is—not everybody, by any means!—but among the people you know and see every day there are no doubt a good many who have much worse concealed in their well-locked closets than you are likely ever to have. You're not half as depraved as you're kidding yourself you are. Why, Doc and Sam—"

"Don't tell me *they've* done things that——"

He laughed. "No, not that I know of. They're thirty-two carat. What I was going to say, coming out here, Doc said, by heavens! he was going to ask you to marry him, and that staunch Virginian Sam said, by Gawd suh! he was planning to do the same."

Her lips trembled.

"They really meant it," said Pen, "so I told them they'd better not ask you to-night because to-night you'd be sure to turn them down."

"Oh, Pen!" said Sawyer. "I know I made a fool of myself to-day—and I know I'm sunk—hopelessly sunk. But it's so—I can't tell you how it helps!—to have friends like you and Kit and—and them!"

He got up and took her hands and brought her to her feet.

"We're going to run along now. How about a little kiss for your Uncle Pen—just to show him you like him in spite of how bad he is?"

She lifted her lips and he kissed them lightly. He turned her round to face the door.

"Now, our lovely half-wit," he said, giving her a pat on the behind to start her off, "go and get yourself a good night's sleep. And don't dream about it!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SAWYER kept pretty much to her house the next few weeks. A handful of other friends stayed by her and came to see her once or twice. Like Pen, they tried to show by word and manner that there were those who still held her in close affection, but they found her spiritless and unresponsive. They thought her state of shock due to the fury of the attack by the townspeople. That fact played its part in her condition, as did a horrified remorse for her own conduct the afternoon of the "tea." The few friends who called did not guess the major factor that held her listless.

She was waiting for one person to come.

The memory of it was persistent and sickening: the moment when Allen Dunbar stood in her kitchen and she thought he had come to save her and he had instead convicted and damned her without giving her an instant's hearing. That injustice tortured and rankled and would not be forgotten.

She had ample time for solitary thought now; and she began to realise that from the moment she first laid eyes on Allen Dunbar she had sought his respect, and put herself at the mercy of his respect and had come to depend upon it. The day she made his acquaintance she had been a dazzled, inexperienced girl making a sortie into what she conceived to be a brilliant society. He had been presented to her as a man of education, travel, and culture, coolly observant, discerning, and critical. During those feverish forty-eight hours in Washington, so crucial for her, when it was exceedingly important that she know how she was faring in the company she so wonderfully found herself in, she had subconsciously used his estimates of her as a gauge of her progress. When he smiled, as he did in the McCraes' drawing room, she was buoyed by confidence; when his eyebrows lifted, as they did in reaction to a remark she made at dinner, she was sick with fear that she was not measuring up to the requirements. Someone else might have served as well as a sounding board: it happened he was the one who was there. And once she had accepted the device of his opinion to reassure or warn her, she had realised now, continued to depend on it in the crises of the months that followed. When she triumphed, she knew it by his smile of approval; when she failed, she was informed by his frown.

He did not come.

Her only word from any of the Dunbars was a brief, scrawled note by mail: "Chin up. Overton Dunbar." She struck it in her dressing-table mirror. What, she wondered, would be Mrs. Dunbar's reaction if she knew her husband had sent those incalculably heartening two words.

Kit brought news that a movement was afoot to petition the government to open some other farm bordering the town to take care of the needed expansion, and that the Thurston brothers were fighting it frantically. From her windows Sawyer could see the "For Sale" signs standing forlorn. Work had ceased on the four or five houses that had been started. She looked in the direction of the honkytonks as seldom as possible. She learned that the street they lined had been given the odious name of Goo Goo Avenue because a dance-hall chanteuse had made a hit with the new song, "Just Because She Made Dem Goo Goo Eyes." The nights were hideous with noises from the district—Saturday nights, when restless men from the grain-elevator and cotton-gin hamlets which were springing up along the railroad blew in to shoot their pay, were bedlam. She was repeatedly terrified by drunks who wandered over and sang songs or shouted obscenities outside her windows; she ordered double locks for all doors, had Joe provide himself with a shotgun, and slept with cotton in her ears.

Barney Foster, coming to see her, found her gloomy, and sought to cheer her by turning over to her five hundred dollars in cash. It represented, he said, a dividend from one of her stocks.

"When, oh when will the time come, Barney, that you can bring me into the city limits and order those places away?"

"Not too far distant, I hope," said Barney. "The pressure on me and the council to bring the tract in has been terrific. As you might imagine, that perpetual crusader Allen Dunbar has led the fight for it. And of course, oblivious to everything but his own political advancement, he doesn't know that if he succeeded he would open the gates of prison for you—and maybe me and and Mr. Carver. I've had to do something drastic—something that hurt me deeply—in order to stave off the pressure."

"What, Barney?"

"Well, I made the point, around town, that I didn't see why the town should extricate you from your own wilfulness—let you suffer! Yours isn't the only land available—why should we seek to undo what is obviously the punishment of God brought down on your head? It wasn't a difficult idea to sell. Old Testament. They relish the thought of hell-fire revenge, these bigots."

She lowered her head.

"Will you dine with me to-morrow evening at Everett's Restaurant?" he asked suddenly.

"Why, I—— Why do you ask me?"

"I've stood about as much as I can the pretence of not being loyal to you. I'll be blessed if I'll do it. I'd like to take you out in public and show them Barney Foster is your friend."

"But you can't do that, Barney. You simply can't."

"I thought you'd say that. It's your nature." He paused. "Sawyer," he came and sat beside her and put an arm around her shoulders. "Why don't we get out of here? I've about had my fill of this place, and you certainly should have. Let's go to New York and live like human beings—the two of us."

She shook her head.

"You know how fond I am of you?" he said gently.

She laid her head against his chest. "A knowledge of your friendship's the one thing that has sustained me through all this."

"But why, Sawyer, couldn't it be more than friendship? We're entitled to it."

"I know what it must be like for you, Barney, and, really, I've thought about it a great deal. If I could feel something more than I do, I'd do anything you ask, gladly. But I don't, Barney. I've searched my heart, and as much as I respect you and depend on you as a friend, that's all there is. And I couldn't, feeling only that."

"I'm still going to hope, though."

She lifted her head and looked at him. "And as for going away, Barney, I'm still sticking to the resolution I made long ago—never to run again." She smiled: "It's like the song, 'In Dixieland I've made my stand.'"

"All right. Do you need anything? What can I bring you? What can I do for you? I'm yours to command, Sawyer. And don't worry too much—I think these honkytonks will be petering out in a few months—the country's quieting down. This is just temporary."

But Allen Dunbar's staying away, she thought, how temporary is that?

Two evenings later she went to dine with the Pendletons. Sam, Doc, and Vera were also guests. Sawyer had already begun to perceive, from her experience when she occasionally sallied out defiantly to shop, her hard eyes challenging anyone to utter as much as a peep, that people went about their own affairs with hardly a glance at her. The nature of the conversation at the Pendleton's dinner party corroborated her observation: the town was sailing along again as if she did not exist. The evidence did not please her.

There was, for example, the plan for a mass expedition to bring saplings from the mountains and line the streets with them. A good deal of the dinner conversation was devoted to that.

Mrs. Dunbar, it seemed, had had the original idea. According to Kit, she had proposed it as a project for her garden club, and her suggestion was that the members get a few trees for their own yards. But

the idea spread. Almost everyone had come from towns where great shade trees graced lawns and arched streets. Even men who ordinarily gave no thought to such things had sensed a lack in their surroundings. Mrs. Dunbar's suggestion brought home what the lack was: not a tree in town. The Business and Professional Men's Club took up the idea and committees were appointed to plot, plan, and execute. It had been decided that every family which could possibly participate would meet at the city hall square at six o'clock the morning of March fifth, equipped with lunches, shovels, burlap, and children. Draymen and livery stables were persuaded to contribute wagons and other vehicles, not only for transportation for families lacking it, but as conveyances to haul the thousands of saplings which would be dug.

"We're all going out together," said Doc Rogers, turning to Sawyer. "Come with me, won't you?"

"I'd better not," said Sawyer.

Kit's large teeth showed in a sardonic smile. "Sawyer's scared to let them gaze upon her. Did you ever see anyone so buffaloed?"

Sawyer's temper flared. She glared at Kit, then turned to Rogers: "I'd be happy to go with you, Doc!"

Falling Leaf shook her awake at five a.m. She got up drowsily and put on a wool suit of Robin Hood green. While she dressed by lamp-light, Sawyer suddenly recalled that exactly a year go to-day she had awakened from her wedding night. If she could have foreseen then all that had happened to her since, how differently she would have felt on that wonderful morning. Where along the way since that morning had she gone astray in the quest for the good life? She pushed aside the question: she refused to make herself any unhappier than she was already. But the memory of that awakening persisted during breakfast and while she and Falling Leaf prepared the sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs and wrapped the half of a cake which were to be her contribution to the party's luncheon.

She heard Pen's shout outside. She knotted a plaid flannel scarf around her throat, and was standing before the hall mirror adjusting her hat, a soft brown velvet affair with a gold arrow thrust through the folds, when Sam bounded in.

"Doc sends deepest regrets—he can't go," said Sam. "Got a patient out in the country with an infected jaw who's about to die or something."

"Oh, that's too bad," said Sawyer. "Perhaps I'd better not go either then."

"Not on your life!"

He helped her into her seal coat, seized her hamper, and opened the

door for her. She went out with a carriage robe over an arm. The dawn air was crisp, but it wasn't as cold as she had thought it would be.

Pen had hired a flat-topped surrey. Sam got in the front seat with Pen. Kit, Vera, and Sawyer snuggled under the robe in the rear seat.

Hundreds of vehicles were rolling out of town, some of them with lanterns not yet extinguished. The majority drove west; they would turn north toward the mountains at the third north-south section line. A great many, like Pen, elected to drive up through the Indian pasture, which, two miles wide, bore north-westerly all the way to the mountains.

They had a lot of fun riding up, playing "Twenty Questions" and "I'm-thinking-of-a-word-that-rhymes-with—," though Pen terrified the girls by getting into a mad race from time to time with other drivers.

In the mountains by nine o'clock, they made their way over a rocky road into the forest to the appointed place of assembly.

Many had already arrived. After unhitching and tethering their teams, the men took shovels and plodded off in all directions in search of maple, elm, and oak; the women gathered in sociable groups to gossip or make ready their joint luncheons. The woods soon echoed with the shouts of playing children and the cautioning calls of mothers. Sawyer covertly watched the women out of the corners of her eyes. Failing to detect so much as a glance from any of them, she could not decide on pique or relief.

The Pendleton party strolled into the forest together. Pen and Sam dug around saplings and lifted them out and the girls wrapped the balls of dirt and pinned the burlap with nails. Wagons roved the woods, gathering saplings that were ready.

By eleven o'clock, Pen and Sam were exhausted by the unaccustomed digging; the girls announced they were weary too.

"Not another lick," said Pen finally, "without I have a splash of that Johnny Walker."

"I thought we were saving that for the ride home to-night," said Kit.

"Well," said Pen slyly, "if you want to."

"I don't want to."

They laughed at her answer and went into a little draw beyond the sight of critical eyes. When the jigger came to Sawyer, she declined.

"Still being a sissy?" jibbed Kit.

"Still," said Sawyer, "and forevermore."

The work seemed more pleasant to the others after the refreshment, and, following a second round, even more so. By lunch time, the party had a slight edge on, with the exception of Sawyer, who became quieter and moodier as the others became gayer.

Kneeling at her hamper, Sawyer heard Kit say, "How about partaking with us, Allen, me lad?"

She looked up quickly. Allen, bareheaded, dressed in a red-checked lumberjack shirt, riding breeches, and laced boots, was just pausing without quite halting. In the space of time his eyes took in Kit, Pen, Sam, and Vera, he said, "Sure," but then he also saw Sawyer, and he added curtly, "Sorry, I've just remembered—I promised——" and he strode on.

Sawyer stared after him. "Why, the—the——"

"'Cad' is as good a word as any," offered Kit.

Sam McCall and Vera were embarrassed. Pen gazed after Allen disapprovingly.

"I wouldn't sit down at the same table with him!" said Sawyer.

"We don't have a table," said Kit.

"Come here." Sawyer took Kit's arm and firmly led her to one side. "Why," she demanded, "did you ask that Allen Dunbar to stop with us?"

"Because Sawyer, my sweet," said Kit wearily, "the man's head over heels in love with you and you might as well get together sooner as later."

"In love with *me*? That—that——?"

"That handsome young man whose reprehensible conduct probably keeps you awake nights."

"I never give him a thought—except black ones."

"He gives you plenty of thought—pretty pink ones."

"How can you be so absurd?"

"Allen has been moping and glooming until I've thought if somebody gave him a gun he'd shoot himself. I've a notion that quiet young man has churning in his soul that would cause quite an explosion if the lid he keeps tightly clamped ever got away from him."

"It would suit me if he blew himself up."

"Every time he comes to our house he wants to know what you're doing, how you're getting along, and if he isn't insanely in love with you up to his neck I simply don't know men—and I think I do."

"I don't believe a word of it."

"Don't, then."

"The idea nauseates me."

"Does it?"

"Of all the men I *wouldn't* want——"

"Yes? Well, you can be sure he wants you—has for a long time, if I'm any judge. As a matter of fact, I think he's hoped I'd play a female John Alden, but I said, hunh-unh, he's got to do his own fixing, and—here I am John Aldening."

"And letting your imagination run wild."

"Dear Sawyer, I may be a littlenear-sighted, but you're completely blind."

All through luncheon the others chatted brightly, but Sawyer ate in silence. She brooded. She glowered at Allen. His back to her, he was eating with his family under the trees a hundred and fifty yards away.

In her heart was a scowl as bitter as that on her face.

After lunch, Pen and Sam, protesting how their muscles ached, took their shovels and set out for more saplings. Vera strolled off to chat with friends. Sawyer and Kit sat on leather pillows and leaned against a tree. Observing Sawyer's expression, Kit prudently kept silent.

Sawyer saw Allen, a spade over his shoulders, leave his family and set off into the forest alone. Her lips curled uglily.

Kit leaned her head against the tree and closed her eyes. After a while she became conscious of a slow, rhythmic thumping. She opened her eyes. Sawyer was rigidly pounding a tight fist against her knee. Kit said nothing.

Ten minutes later, Sawyer suddenly spoke. "Kit."

"Yes?"

"I can't stand it."

"Can't stand what?"

"Him. Something's got to happen. I feel that man has haunted me my entire life. I can't move that he isn't there. He's everywhere I am. He rules me!"

"Oh, now——"

"I can't endure cowering before him any longer. I'm a woman. He's got to be shown. He's got to be taught!"

"Well?"

Sawyer got to her feet. She unbuttoned her seal coat and tugged loose the scarf at her throat. "It's too hot. Who would think this is March?"

"I'm comfortable," said Kit.

Sawyer lifted the coat off her shoulders and let it fall in a heap behind her. She drew herself up. "Well, goodbye," she said, and started off.

Kit got to her knees. "Wait a minute!"

Sawyer turned, her gray eyes slitted feline, her mouth twisted sourly.

"Sawyer, you're angry! Where are you going?"

"To find him."

"But why?"

"I've got it all planned. I'm going to get him off alone and," fury driving the words hoarse from her throat, "I'm going to talk to him—oh, I'll know how to say what I'll say! I'm going to make him admit it."

"Admit what?"

"That he loves me. He thinks he's so damned pure, does he? He thinks I'm a bad woman, does he? I'll show him how bad I can be. We'll just see how much Mr. O. So Superior can stand!"

"Listen a minute."

"I won't listen! I'm going to make him take me in his arms and kiss me passionately and confess he wants me—all of me—you don't think I can do that, do you?"

Kit scrambled to her feet. "Sawyer!"

"——and when he gives in and admits it I'm going to laugh in his face. How I'll laugh. I'm going to back off and point a finger at him and I'm going to say, 'You poor fool. I made you admit you wanted me.' Then I'm going to walk away."

"You can't do that, Sawyer."

She didn't answer. She turned and set off in the direction she had seen Allen take.

Families and made-up parties began departing for home about three o'clock. Pen and Sam decided they had done more than their share. They put their spades in the back of the surrey, hitched the team, Kit and Vera loaded the luncheon equipment, gathered pillows—and then they waited.

By four o'clock the exodus had become general. Still they waited.

"I think we'd better go and look for her," said Pen. "She might be lost."

"I think we'd better wait," said Kit.

There weren't more than half a dozen groups left in the picnic area when the sun slid behind the hills at five o'clock. One group, long ready to go, was the Dunbar family.

"I know darn well she's lost," said Pen. "Sam and I are going to start a search."

"Do you suppose Allen's lost as well?" asked Kit. "Do you see him around here?"

"Well——"

To pass the time, Pen and Sam sat on the grass and began playing mumblety-peg with Sam's pocket knife. The girls affected an interest and the men began teaching them the simpler stunts of the game. Nobody's mind was very much on it.

The only people left were themselves, and, apart, the Dunbar family. The air had become chilly.

Kit exclaimed, "My dears—will you look?"

They followed the direction of the pointed knife blade.

Sawyer and Allen were plodding through the twilight forest. Their arms were around each other.

"It's a mirage," said Vera.

"Pretend you don't notice," said Kit. "They're separating from that death grip now."

They got up and busied themselves around the surrey, the men adjusting harness, the girls shoving hampers around. The couple came directly to the surrey. Kit waited until they had halted beside it before she looked straight at them.

Allen stood very tall and masculine, his eyes challenging, his lips pale. Sawyer's mouth was slack, her face drained, her eyes spent. Hatless, hair untidy, the throat of her shirtwaist torn open. Three red scratches down Allen's right cheek. A blue bruise on Sawyer's left cheekbone.

For once, Kit lacked words suitable for an occasion.

"I'll ride home with you," said Allen.

It was not a request that he be permitted to ride with them; it was a declaration.

"Fine, fine," said Pen heartily.

Sam McCall bit his lip and turned away. Vera kept her eyes on the ground.

"I'll go and tell my family," said Allen. He touched Sawyer's shoulder reverently. "I'll be right back."

She gazed up at him and did not speak.

He strode off.

"Well!" said Pen, breaking the pause. "We've been worried about you. We didn't know——"

"Pen," said Kit. He closed his mouth. Kit took Sawyer's coat from the surrey and placed it around her shoulders. "I think we left a couple of spoons where we ate luncheon. Come help me find them, won't you?"

Silently, Sawyer went with her. When they reached the spot, Kit stopped. Sawyer also stopped.

Kit peered at her. "Nice day for sleepwalking."

Sawyer smiled foolishly.

"What's happened?"

"Nothing's happened," said Sawyer absently.

"That's quite apparent."

"He loves me," said Sawyer, not to Kit, but to a large tree some one hundred feet away. "He has always loved me—from the first."

"No!"

"You were right."

"But I was making it up! Does he really?"

Sawyer had fallen back into her reverie. A smile caressed the corners of her mouth momentarily. "And I never knew," she mused.

"Did you tell him what you planned to?"

"I think so."

"Well, you probably did. Then—did he take you in his arms—and kiss you?"

"Yes!"

"Where was all this?"

"And then you laughed at him and walked away."

"In a little canyon."

"Yes."

"How far did you get?"

"Not far."

She was answering like a mechanical toy again.

"And then?"

"Oh, nothing . . . Let's not talk about it . . ."

"Where did you get that bruise on your cheek?"

Sawyer did not seem to hear.

"It couldn't be he actually hit you there? I couldn't believe that."

"It's all right," said Sawyer, still gazing at the far-off tree. "He wasn't himself."

"Oh, he wasn't?"

"He had a right to. I scratched him first."

"Where's your hat?"

Sawyer carefully reached up and touched the top of her head. "It's gone."

Kit winced. From the back of Sawyer's hair she plucked a dead leaf, a broken twig. "Why did you scratch him?"

She didn't answer. Her shadowed eyes were content with distance.

"Ye gods," breathed Kit. "Hypnotised. The man's a Svengali." Severely, she repeated, "Why did you claw him?"

"He wouldn't let me up."

Muttered Kit, "That tears it." Aloud: "Did he?"

"What?"

"Let you up."

Kit waited for the question to reach whatever part of Sawyer's mind was functioning; an answer was returning from it——

"No," said Sawyer.

Kit took her shoulders and shook her. "You little fool! You mustn't say that—not even to me! You should tell me, 'Yes, of course he did!'"

Sawyer blinked and nodded in agreement. "Yes, of course he did," she repeated.

Kit groaned. "Now if you'll just inquire 'Where am I?'" she said sarcastically, "the thing will be perfect."

Sawyer pouted. "I know where I am," she said resentfully.

"That Allen Dunbar!" said Kit. "Of all the imbecile——"

Allen had been talking with his family—especially, it appeared, to his animated mother. He left them, they drove off, and he started back for the surrey. Kit beckoned. He veered to her and Sawyer.

"You—you——" snapped Kit as he drew near. "You thoughtless oaf, you——"

"What are you talking about?" demanded Allen coldly.

"Bringing her back here looking like the wrath of God!"

"I'm afraid you're talking about something that's none of your business."

"I'm making it my business. What you two do is your own affair—the blessings of the saints go with you. But it's your responsibility to protect her. You're simply foul to bring her back here with all the signs written all over both of you."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Allen. "We haven't done anything."

"Good! Stick with it! But you've got to have a better story than that. If you don't care about Sawyer Tyndall's reputation—such as she has left—I do! Look at you, both of you. Scratched, torn, dishevelled, moon-eyed——"

Allen faltered. "I hadn't thought."

"Obviously," said Kit. "Now listen, you babes in the woods! You were digging a sapling near the edge of the ravine, and Sawyer slipped and took a tumble down the steep bank, her cheek striking a stone. You were down after like a shot, scratching yourself on thorns as you rescued her. And that's all! Don't elaborate. Do you have it straight? Then come on, and for heaven's sake, both of you, get that insane cat-that-ate-the-canary gloating off your faces."

They followed her obediently.

At the surrey, Sawyer turned and laid a hand on Allen's arm. "I forgot my hat, dear," she said.

"I'll get it for you," said Allen gently. He set off into the dusk.

Sawyer favoured the others with a vague smile. "Allen fell down a bank," she said. "I had to go after him."

Kit threw up her hands. "Oh, ye gods and little fishes! What a ride home! I wish I'd brought my trombone!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

SAWYER had never seen Falling Leaf so infuriatingly slow. She herself flying about the house in gingham dress and dustcap, while the woman lagged, lagged, lagged at the tasks Sawyer set for her. The entire house *had* to be spotless. Crystal had to sparkle, mirrors had to shine, furniture had to have a well-rubbed gleam, carpets had to be like new. There mustn't be a speck of dust in the remotest corner or on the highest shelf—and the time was so short.

She got out every piece of sterling she owned—tableware, vases, pitchers, tea set, trays, nut dishes—and put them all on the kitchen table. Then she called to Falling Leaf to lay aside the carpet sweeper and come help. They drew up stools and set to polishing. Occasionally, Sawyer would pause, her eyes would become set in a distant stare, and she would let herself dream of the afternoon before. She would snap herself out of it and rub with renewed vigour.

"Why we spic all this junk?" complained Falling Leaf. "You say just him coming—two people use all this?"

"Everything must be perfect," said Sawyer. "Everything!"

"Who's gonna care?" grumbled Falling Leaf.

Sawyer glanced at her hands—polishing the silver was ruining them. It was eleven by the kitchen clock anyway. She would have to leave the silver chore to F.L.

Joe had been washing the upstairs windows. He came down a ladder outside the kitchen and moved it to the next window. Sawyer went to the door and told him he could finish the windows later, to please bring around the carriage. "And oh, Joe, I want you to be sure and clean out the stables sometime to-day, oil and polish the harness, and make everything tidy."

She ran upstairs and put on a street dress. Seated at her writing desk, she drew out an envelope, clicked a pencil against her teeth, and tried to plan a menu. She didn't want it to be elaborate or look special. What she wanted was a good, substantial supper such as a husband coming home from the office would expect and enjoy. Cream of tomato—that was his favourite soup—she would serve him that. Steak, by all means, if Hogan's had nice ones. She wished it were summer, so she could serve all fresh vegetables, but she would have a potato dish, and canned peas, and—perhaps canned asparagus? She couldn't remember whether he liked asparagus. Coffee—and oh yes! a can of red cherries for her cherry pie. Or would ice cream——? No, pie.

She ran downstairs and out to the kitchen. Falling Leaf stood leaning

against a counter, her arms crossed moodily. Why, Sawyer wailed inwardly, would the woman have to pick to-day to be such a trial?

Sawyer put her back to polishing silver, told her to be sure and sweep the front steps and walk, use the cedar mop round the rugs—"and I want you to bake some rolls."

"We just bake two, three days ago," objected Falling Leaf.

"But I want *fresh* bread!"

"Thought *you* gonna cook this supper."

"I am. But I would like for you to do the bread. Please, F.L., don't be difficult."

She ran out to the waiting carriage.

"Joe," she said, as they drove into town, "I want you to be sure and wash the carriage this afternoon—and make it sparkle."

"You said me and aunt was going to have carriage to-night."

"Oh, yes, that's right—but it must look nice anyway."

She found a beautiful porterhouse steak at Hogan's. By great good luck, the grocer had got in a shipment of hothouse lettuce. She knew just the salad dressing she would prepare.

She had other shopping to do: a new door mat to replace the one badly worn—she was delighted when she found a fibre mat with "Welcome" printed across it; Oriental incense to light in the library, so that its fragrance would only faintly permeate the parlour. Shyly, she went into Badger's Men's Stores and made some purchases there.

When she got home, Falling Leaf was seated at the kitchen table, still dawdling with the silver. She had done exactly nothing else. Exasperated, Sawyer spoke to her sharply.

Falling Leaf slammed down the polishing rag and got to her feet.

"Quit!" she announced.

"You can't!" cried Sawyer.

"Quit!"

"You can't do that to me, F.L. There's so much to be done! I'm helping you all I can. And you're going to the Wild West show to-night—I'll buy your tickets!"

Falling Leaf thrust out her lower lip.

"Wait!" said Sawyer desperately. She returned with a purple hat ornamented with a white egret plume. She had worn it only once herself, darn it! but— She held it out. "Look! If you wore this to the show all your friends would burn with envy!"

Falling Leaf's black eyes gleamed covetously.

"Keep?" she asked.

"Yes! You may keep it."

Falling Leaf put the hat on her head and sat down to the silver again. She had waited until too late to bathe and dress in time—she *knew*

she had. She splashed, soaped, sponged; and dried herself with harsh swiftness. She had earlier decided on her dress: a simple frock, pale blue—soft, calm, and wifely.

She tried futilely to overlay her cheekbone bruise with rice powder. Seeing the mark might embarrass him. She threw down the puff at last. Oh well, she concluded, he *put* it there.

She went down the back stairs to spend a few minutes in the kitchen, then went into the dining-room for a last-minute check. Silver on damask, places set for two, long candles——

She looked at the clock. One minute till seven.

She lit the candles.

At one minute past he had not knocked. Waiting, standing over the candles, uneasiness grazed her. Two minutes, three. Suppose he wouldn't come? Four minutes after. He wasn't coming. Were those footsteps? No. She wanted to weep.

A rap at the door.

She flew to it. There he stood, tall, handsome, grinning, hat in hand. The light and noises of the honkytonks behind him. She took his arm and brought him in and closed the door. She stood off from him as he removed his topcoat and hung it on the rack. How handsome in brown tweeds! Three red welts on his cheek. Her heart swelled possessively: he had her mark on him.

He took a pink-bowed package from his topcoat pocket.

"I brought you a box of candy."

"Oh, thank you!"

Suddenly, they were both shy.

"Hello," he grinned.

"Hello yourself."

He took a step to her, bent his head and pecked her lips. It was exactly the way she had hoped he would do it.

She hooked a hand under his arm and led him into the parlour. She guided him to the large wing chair she had selected to be his. She watched his eyes as they took in the newspaper folded on the chair arm, the meerschaum pipe and humidor on the reading-lamp table beside the chair, the sheep-lined slippers on the floor before it.

He looked at her. They both laughed.

He sank into the chair and picked up one of the slippers, gravely looked at it, and fitted the sole of it against the sole of his shoe. It wasn't nearly large enough.

She wanted to cry.

"I'll exchange them to-morrow," she said hastily.

He took up the pipe and examined it. Thoughtfully, he reached for the humidor and filled the bowl. An anxious smile trembled on her

lips. He struck a match to it, got it going; he took three deep, deliberate puffs. He held it off and looked at it.

"Good pipe," he said.

She let out a sigh of relief.

"You just read your paper! I know you're tired. I'll have supper ready in fifteen minutes."

At supper, he said all the right things. Cream of tomato—his favourite of all soups. He had never tasted a steak broiled just so. Where did she ever learn to prepare such potatoes? What fluffy hot rolls. He had always enjoyed cherry pie, but he'd no idea it could be so delicious. And take this coffee, for example—not more than once or twice in a lifetime will you meet a person who can make coffee like this.

She thought she would burst with happiness and pride.

How could she ever have been so stupid as to follow will-o'-the-wisps in search of happiness. This was the best—oh, the best!—that life could hold; just she and Allen, away from all others.

From her end of the table the candlelight showed him so ruggedly good-looking. Did she seem lovely from his end of the table?

During the meal, she tried to keep up a bright patter that would sound accustomed and domestic.

"Did you have a hard day at the office?"

"Oh, so-so. Lots of papers to draw up."

"Nothing specially interesting to report?"

"Not specially. What have you been doing? Have you been busy?"

"I? Oh, not at all. I haven't done a thing. Except——"

His fine hazel eyes inquired with interest.

"Well, except from time to time, all day, I tried to imagine just what you were doing at that moment. Do you believe in clairvoyance? I could see you so plainly—working at your desk——"

"Now, that's a funny thing."

"What is, Allen?"

"I tried to picture you the same way. Most of the afternoon, I remember, you seemed to be lying at ease on your sofa, reading a book. Were you?"

"Well-I-I, not exactly. But I easily *could* have been."

Try to be not so breathless, she told herself. Remember, this is just an ordinary evening where he has come home, and you had supper ready, and it has been like this on a thousand evenings.

"Well, anyway," she said, "it's been quite a day. Hasn't it?"

"Yes, it has."

He insisted that he be allowed to dry the dishes for her, prevailed over her protest that they could let them go. She tied an apron on him, and they laughed a good deal during the dish-washing operation, and

when they had everything tidy, he put his arm around her and they left the kitchen.

Entering the parlour, she casually released herself and indicated his chair. "I have something you'll be interested in seeing, I think," she said. She went to the library and returned with a stereoscope and boxes of slides. "Here are some amazing views of the Grand Canyon. I'm sure you'll enjoy looking at them."

"I'm sure I will," he said. "What are you going to do?"

"I? Oh, I have something to do."

She left the room again, and returned from the back parlour with a pyrography set and a wooden box. She placed the alcohol lamp on the table, opposite him, lighted it, and put the iron into the flame.

Allen, his pipe clenched in the corner of his mouth, put a view into the stereoscope, looked briefly, and replaced it with another.

He seems to be having a good time, she thought.

"Oh!" She got his candy. "It's such a pretty ribbon I hate to open it. Oh, what exquisite bon-bons! Won't you have one?" He took one, she bit one in half. "Mmm, how delicious!" she exclaimed.

She sat across the table from him and studied the traced design of the Indian head on the wooden box. She decided to start with the feathered head-dress. She applied the red-hot iron to the wood. A curl of smoke rose. She became absorbed in the work.

"Well!" said Allen. "Those were very interesting. Now——"

"But the other packet," she said. "You haven't looked at the views of Palestine yet. They're very interesting also."

"Oh. The views of Palestine. Yes, of course." He sat back and reached for the stereoscope again.

She lowered her head over her work.

"Well!" he said at last. "Those *were* interesting."

She continued burning the design into the wood.

"I sometimes think," she said, "that after all a quiet evening at home is best, don't you?"

"I certainly do!"

He began coughing. He took out his handkerchief and covered his mouth until he had controlled it.

"Are you all right?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes. But tell me, Sawyer—doesn't all this wood smoke filling the room bother you?"

"Why, Allen Dunbar! I'm making this handkerchief box for you!"

"Oh! That's—that's very—thank you so much."

She extinguished the alcohol lamp. "I can finish it another time, though. Well, what shall we do now?"

"Oh," he said carelessly, "anything."

"I'll tell you what. Let's make some popcorn."

He slapped his knees and got up. "Bully idea!"

They went out to the kitchen and popped it and brought a bowlful back to the parlour.

"How about some singing?" said Allen. "My rich baritone has been commented on favourably in many quarters."

"And my playing," said Sawyer, giving the piano stool a whirl and seating herself, "is the rage of three continents. Though I don't see how you can sing with your mouth full of popcorn."

"Didn't you know? That's my most extraordinary accomplishment."

They sang a good many of the old favourites, sometimes one or the other of them singing alone, then in duet. Their voices went awfully well together, she thought.

Allen's voice seemed to be tiring. She didn't want to drag this evening out so long that he wearied of it. Oh, by no means!

She got up and went to the middle of the room and turned, delicately patting a yawn.

"Well, it must be about bedtime," she said.

He came to her swiftly.

She stopped him at arm's length with a forefinger jabbed in his chest.

"That, my dear Allen, was the last line of our little playlet."

"What do you mean?"

"Come with me," she said firmly.

He followed her to the hall. She took his hat from the rack and put it on his head. She held open his topcoat.

"But——" he protested.

"Put it on," she said. He obeyed. She buttoned it. "Now. You may kiss me good night. Take your hat off first."

She lifted her face and he took her in his arms. She kept her hands against his chest, and when his kiss became ardent, she pushed. He crushed her body to his. "Don't, Allen," she tried to say. His relentless-ness overwhelmed her, and she slid her arms around him and responded to his passion.

She tore her mouth away, gave her cheek to his lips. "Please, Allen. I want you to go now."

"I can't go. You're mine."

"Please, darling," she begged. "We did as you wanted yesterday. Do as I want to-night."

He released her.

"Won't you smile?" she asked.

He grinned. "All right. We'll do as you say. You're incomprehensible—but you always were."

She laughed and patted his lapel. "Good night."

"Good night, Sawyer. It was wonderful."

He went out and walked off toward town. She watched him go until he faded into the night, then she closed the door. She flung out her arms, clasped her hands behind her neck, and arched her head luxuriantly.

Wonderful! he had said. It had been perfect.

Humming a snatch of tune, she went round turning out lamps, then lightly mounted the stairs.

She could not sleep. The evening had been as she wanted, and had ended as she wanted. She tossed restlessly. He hadn't wanted to go. She had sent him away. But he might not have accepted her mere suggestion so readily. Perhaps he hadn't really wanted to stay. Perhaps he had only pretended to desire it, just enough to be polite. Oh, you did it yourself, it was all your idea. She rolled on her back . . .

O Allen, Allen.

She must have dozed; she had a distinct feeling of waking. What had awakened her? Yes! a bump of something against the house. She lifted her head. Where had she heard that identical sound—earlier in the day? Joe cleaning windows! Several times his ladder had bumped against the house.

Terror clutched her. She could hear the drunken, abandoned noises of the honkytonks. A roisterer, a fiend, trying to break in. Joe and his shotgun not here—oh, if only Allen were——

What was that?

"Maid of Athens, ere we part, give oh give me back my heart. Lord Byron."

She sat bolt upright.

"Nothing in the world is single, all things by a something-something, in one spirit meet and mingle. Shelley."

She swung out of bed. The silhouette of head and shoulders star-lighted outside the pane. She ran to the window and tugged and threw up the sash. "Oh, Allen, darling!"

He leaned his elbows on the sill. His hat pushed back, he grinned up at her. "Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty, youth's a stuff will not endure. *Twelfth Night*, I think— or *As You Like It*, possibly."

"Allen, my sweet!"

He clambered into the room. They stood, dimly seen and dimly seeing, until he moved, and she was no longer a person apart. All time and movement, all hearing and spoken word, vanishing . . . a jumble, a flurry . . . then a joint reclining, a silent word . . . lips on hers, a hand fondling, wherever it touched and lingered ineffable sensation driving . . . Now . . . Now . . . !" she begged.

"Sawyer . . ."

Languidly, she turned her head on the pillow toward him.

"Yes, dearest?"

"You haven't gone to sleep, have you?"

"No, I was thinking . . ."

He turned his head and kissed her hair. "Of what?"

"Of the bare limbs of the trees arched over us—it was like a cathedral . . . the pines like spires."

"It will always be a hallowed spot for us, won't it?"

"Hallowed, yes. Always."

"Let's go back some day soon—like to?—and stand in it again."

"On all important occasions we must—to remember the beginning. We will walk soft and speak low . . ."

They lay silent for a time.

"Oh, Allen! Yesterday. Suppose you hadn't!"

"Suppose I hadn't what, dear?"

Suddenly, she felt playful: "Well, forced your will upon me."

"I resent your use of the word forced," he said indignantly. She laughed. "You make it sound as if I——"

"It's the nearest word I could use." She whispered in his ear: "What you really did to me requires a word we don't use in my set."

"That is an utterly false and base accusation, my calculating minx. I distinctly remember that just at the last you——"

"By that time your persuasiveness had overcome my reason. I'm only a woman—and you're so much stronger."

"No court of law would ever——"

"I should have had you arrested."

"No woman—especially a woman I happen to have suffered the agonies of the damned day and night out of my desire that they——"

"You'd better start over. You're all tangled up."

"No woman, I repeat, is going to seek me out and by deceitful guile snare me into laying bare the innermost secret of my heart, and then cackle over it, without paying——"

"I don't cackle! You make me sound like a witch."

"You are a witch. You deserve to be burned at the stake."

"Oh, Allen!" She half lifted herself and leaned over him. "How could I have been so blind? How much I robbed myself of by being so stupid for so long."

"You can't help being stupid. Kiss me."

She held his face in her hands and tried to see into his shadowed eyes and kissed him softly.

"You're so sweet," she said.

"You're so wonderful."

"Has it truly hurt you? All this time?"

"Didn't I tell you yesterday—didn't I tell you how much?"

"I want you to tell me again. When were you hurt the most?"

"There were so many times. But I think most of all on the train riding down, and the first day in El Reno—when you seemed to be so hurt—and frightened, and——" He paused; she could tell that he sensed she did not want him to recall that. "But the moment of deepest despair, I think——"

"Yes, dearest?"

"When we stood at the depot and I was about to leave, and I was saying to myself if only I had any possible excuse, no matter how slight—I did not see how I could bear to go out of your life—when all I wanted was to be near you, where I could see you and hear you—I was calling myself ten kinds of fool to let myself be going."

"Oh, Allen, I felt something then too. I didn't know then what it was—but it must have been something. Darling, darling, why, oh why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"How could I? You never showed that you had the slightest——"

"But yesterday, when you finally did—— Oh sweet, you terrified me so! You were like a mad man, Allen, really you were. I thought you had gone insane, I never dreamed you had it in your nature to say such things as you did, to behave as you did—and oh, how wonderful you were."

His rude hand seized her shoulder and pulled her down beside him. "You're mine."

"I'm yours," she whispered. To breathe was becoming painful again. She ran her fingers through the crinkly hair of his chest; straying, her hand slid along the corrugations of his flat stomach: it was like caressing warmed bronze . . . His lips found a way through a mass of tresses to her lips. She clutched his lean back and pulled him over. His head lowered, he whispered from her bosom, "I love you, I love you." "I'm glad, so glad," she whispered. He was murmuring into her heart. "Do you love me, Sawyer?" Her heart pounded in sudden fear. "Say you love me." "Don't ask me that," she begged. "I want you to say it," he pleaded, "if you do love me." She thrust a breast to his mouth. "Just take me," she whimpered, "please take me . . . !"

Lying content, supine, her neck resting in the hollow of his shoulder, his arm under her strong, but his hand cupped tenderly, his heart slowling, pulsating against her side . . . cradled in serenity.

"I wrote Martha this morning," he said quietly after a while.

"Did you give her a reason why?"

"Only that it seemed best."

"You didn't mention us?"

"Should I have?"

"I'm glad you didn't. It would only hurt her more."

They returned to silence.

"Allen?"

"Hmhm?"

"Could any two people ever have been as happy as we are at this moment?"

"Not possibly."

She snuggled. "Tell me something, Allen. Would you say I'm lithe?"

"Very lithe."

"And supple?"

"Extremely supple."

"Clean-limbed?"

"Most clean-limbed, exquisite, and alert."

"I don't feel very alert."

"Odd. And have you given yourself the pleasure of reflecting on my points of beauty?"

"I saw your picture once in a Roman history. Under an assumed name. Apollo of the Belvedere."

"That ungainly, heavy-shanked——"

"Oh, I've seen even better of you. The Discobolus. A faithful reproduction of you."

"My good woman, your low estimation of the symmetry of my physique displays a lamentable ignorance of——" taking a fresh breath
"——what constitutes perfection in the male figure."

She laughed and squirmed closer. "Allen?"

"Yes?"

"I want to kiss you."

"You may have *one*."

"Are you asleep, Allen?"

"No."

"Tell me something."

"Anything—if you'll retract your canard that the Discobolus's physique is as perfect as mine."

"I retract. Tell me—of course there have been *some*—I'd expect that—and anyway I know that what you did before we even knew each other shouldn't concern me—but have there been *many*—I mean, that you actually——"

"I forgot to tell you. I have one physical flaw. An extremely severe case of deafness."

"I stand squelched, my lord."

"Asleep, Sawyer?"

"Hmm-mmh. Just dreaming."

"They seem to have quieted down over there."

"They generally do by this hour. Except Saturdays."

"I've done a lot of thinking. I must have been insane to shout at you the way I did that day. If I knew how to begin to apologise——"

"You were justified. My behaviour——"

"That's just it. Your behaviour. I can see it now—you were under a great strain. I should have seen it then. You're in trouble."

"I don't have any troubles—none, now."

He caressed her hair.

"But I know there's something behind it all," he insisted. "Something that has you at its mercy. It adds up that way."

"Let's not talk about it, Allen."

"But I must help you."

"There's nothing you can do."

"I feel sure's there's something you haven't told. If you'll just start at the beginning, and tell me everything that happened. I've been investigating Ollie Cook. I'm certain there's more to him than——"

"There's nothing I *want* you to do, Allen."

"Your very saying that convinces me that you——"

"I can't say anything, Allen! There are people—innocent people!—besides myself who must be protected."

"Oh." He was silent for some time. "I see."

"You see what? It's not important, Allen, really it's not. I'm awfully sorry for you that you didn't get rid of them, as you wished—and I know now how horrible they are, but——"

He kissed her. "Nothing's important now, except the fact of you and me."

His chest rose and fell under her hand in a contented sigh. "I've dreamed of it so much. So much," he said.

"Of what, dear?"

"Of having you for my wife."

She said nothing.

"How soon can we be married?" he asked. "Right away?"

He shook her gently. "Wake up. I said——"

"Do we have to talk about it now?"

"Of course not."

"This is so wonderful—just this moment."

"Sure it is. But——"

"Allen——" Where were the right words?

"But, dearest——"

A trace of bewilderment?

"Kiss me," she said.

He kissed her sweetly. He waited.

She sighed tremulously, laughed at her funny little sigh, and nestled to show how happy she was.

"Sawyer."

"Yes, dear."

"A while ago you wouldn't say you loved me. You do love me, don't you? Why wouldn't you say it?"

"Allen—I want it to be you forever—I want it to be as glorious as it was all evening with you—downstairs—and as it is now—with you—and never anybody but you."

"And for me, nobody but you. Downstairs this evening I thought, if it could only be like this forever."

"If only like that," she said. "But Allen, at any moment of it—if you had wearied of it, or found you disliked me—you could have walked out. Without being bound to stay, without being tied to it in spite of your change of feeling about it."

"What a queer thing to say."

"Is it?"

"Sawyer. I want you to say you love me, as I do you." He waited for her reply. "Did you hear me?"

"I'm thinking, Allen." At last, she said slowly, "I don't know about the word 'love.' To say you 'love' someone—it's so easy—but it's an important word—because it's so dangerous—it's a word you use, and then you are hurt."

"Hurt?"

"You get hurt."

"Are you trying to say you don't want to marry me?"

"I—I don't know, darling."

"But it's what I've wanted for so long! And now that you've shown that you—I want us to go on with this, to be together forever."

"But can't we be together forever—or as long as you want it—without being married?"

"No! It wouldn't be fair to you. It's incomplete. I want you for my wife. I love you! I—want us to have a family. I want everybody to know you're my wife. I want to shout it from the housetops."

She caressed him gratefully.

He laughed. "You were only joking."

"No. No, I wasn't, Allen."

"Sawyer!"

Was that annoyance? Or anger? Was there the kind of anger, the cruel, grinding anger that got its pleasure from cursing and slapping and killing, lurking behind that hint of annoyance?

"Listen to me," he said.

She cried out in torment: "It's only been twenty-four hours! We didn't even know till yesterday!"

"I knew—I've known—forever."

"I didn't." She writhed. "I can't decide a thing like marriage all in a moment!"

"You did once."

She closed her eyes. "You didn't mean to say that."

"No. I didn't."

"But now that you've mentioned it— Allen, I'd rather pretend—believe it until it's true!—that there has never been anybody but you. Never anybody but you! But it's horrible, the way people can change—no longer what they were before—so different you can't recognise them or remember what it was *before*! And you're trapped. You're caught! You struggle. You die a thousand deaths! And there's no escape, no escape!"

He drew her shuddering body close. "Don't, Sawyer."

"But I *know*. I don't want that. I can't! I can't! I want it this way—" she despised herself for weeping "—where we can have each other, and hold each other, and laugh together, and sing songs together, and— and there's not the dread of being caught if that horrible changing——!"

"Do you think I'd change, Sawyer? I'm not very much, but at least you know what I'm like."

"I don't. I know what you're like right now—and I ache with the joy of knowing you as you are now. But before yesterday, Allen, I didn't know you were like I know you now. You were somebody else—I can hardly remember even now what I thought you were like—but I know it wasn't like this—and then, if we were married—you can't know until it happens—and then—and then—to see it all go down in ruins." She knew her tears must be falling on his chest; blindly, she tried to brush them off. "Oh, I don't mean to say you'd ever be anything but perfect, oh so perfect, my darling, but— Suppose I changed? Suppose you found that what you think I am now——"

"Sawyer!" said Allen firmly.

"What?"

"You're not being honest. These aren't the reasons."

"They are, Allen!"

"No—they're part of it, I suppose. But there must be more than them. They're not enough. Be truthful with me, whatever it is."

"Well—Allen, I— We couldn't get married now, anyway, I've been a widow only eight months. I'd have to wait at least a year, you know that."

"Why?"

"Because! One *has* to. What would everybody say?"

"Who cares?"

"Well, I do. Not for myself. For your sake. Even after we waited the year—I don't know how to say it—and you won't like it—but you know what the people of this town think of me—the kind of person I am. There's nothing I can do about that—it's too late. But you're just getting started on a fine career. If you married me——"

"Oh, bosh!"

"Bosh all you want—but it's the truth."

"Do you think I care anything about that——"

"I have to think about it. You showed yesterday how impulsive and foolhardy you can be. I have to think for two people now."

He laughed. "I'm not going to accept that."

"Yes, you are. Oh, Allen, I couldn't be happy, being married under these circumstances. Just think of the wedding itself. How everybody would snicker at you behind their hands."

"Oh, for God's sake, Sawyer——"

"You don't know. You don't know how it can hurt. Please do as I want, for a little while, anyway. Until I can have time to think."

"Tell me what you want, Sawyer. How do you want it?"

He gave her time to choose her words. She was silent for a long time. Her hand sought his, and her fingers curled supplicatingly. When she finally answered, her voice was controlled and quiet.

"Just now, nothing more than to be yours—as long as you want me. That's all. To belong to nobody but you. To look at you every day, to enjoy having you look at me, to touch you, to give you whatever you ask of me that will make you happy. To have you because I need you, and because you need me——" she began to cry again "—and because I don't want to live without you."

He tenderly moved her head to her pillow and lifted himself to a sitting position and looked down on her, outstretched, pale, fragile, remote in the dimness of starlight, her softly framed face looking up ghostly into his.

"Will it be fair to you that way, Allen?" she asked pitifully.

"For you to offer yourself as you just did—for you to say all that—it's more than any man could deserve to hear from a woman."

She shook her head, weeping for his sincerity.

"I think I understand how you feel, Sawyer—and why you do."

"You can't, really."

"It's all right. I'll count on time. If, in time——"

"That's what I want, Allen. Just time."

He gazed at her for a long moment. Then he grinned.

"I can't quite see you," she said. "Aren't you laughing?"

"Almost. You said you only wanted time. Know what I want?"

"What, dear?"

"Sleep."

"Oh, darling. Lie beside me."

She pulled him down and he kissed her, a lazy, slack kiss.

"Now I'm giving the orders," he said. "I don't believe I can sleep while being choked to death by an insatiable woman." He unloosed her arms. "Good night." He fluffed his pillow and turned his back to her.

"Well, I like that!" She turned her back to him, and pretended to sleep. Presently, though, she craftily rubbed herself against him. "Go to sleep," he commanded.

. . . She fought her way out of a satisfactory dream. No, not a dream; he really was caressing her. "What is it, dear?" she asked drowsily. "It's almost morning—I'll have to leave soon—" "Oh, no!" She clasped him savagely and took his kisses and waited for him . . .

When next she woke, the sun was up. Good heavens, she thought, and already framing the words, "Allen, you've got to get up and go," she turned over to him.

He had already left . . .

She stretched and yawned, and her arms collapsed. Lying happily, she began to plan what she could do to please him to-day.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE trouble was, he had to be at the office all day—every day. How purposeless those hours that took him away from her. How silent the house: a cavern to be wandered in aimlessly and interminably, each succeeding room draped in stillness and hollow with loneliness. She needed no almanac to be informed that the days were growing longer now. Incredible as well that a clock could move at two speeds, each speed perversely contrary to her desire. The dragging day endured, they together again, she once more looking into his eyes, and time at once would begin to race so fast that she wished to cry out for it to stop, to seize it and pull it to a standstill. Like a nicotiana flower, she drooped during the day, and only with the approach of evening did her head lift, her face light.

The hours of separation were apparently as unbearable to him. He protested. And he began doing something about it. At first once a week, then two, three, four times a week, he deserted his work for the afternoon and came out on Jigger, leading a livery stable horse for her. They would circle the town and ride to the river.

Their first trip out, they rambled downstream in search of a retreat. Allen occasionally put Jigger into the thickets and trees which lined the river to see what it was like farther in. At last he found a setting which caught his eye. He called to her and she rode in and exclaimed it was just the spot. A sandy nook at the river's edge, walled by matted climbing vines and roofed by a great, spreading elm which leaned out over the water.

That particular afternoon turned out to be so pleasant that they returned to the same place again and again. "It's as enchanting as our cathedral in the mountains," said Sawyer. "Well," said Allen, depreciating a pride in his discovery, "this is just for everyday use."

And as they continued to seek haven there, the widening channel, freshened by April rains, purled a serenade for them, the elm budded, leafed, and cast a May-time shade, the wild honeysuckle at last sweetened the air. By then, the place had become their home. They would sit out the afternoon there, she leaning against the elm's roots, perhaps, he usually with hands clasped on drawn-up knees, but always facing one another, so they could look at each other constantly. After a time, when she could go no longer without touching him, she might beckon with a finger and he would come to her and stretch out and lie with his head in her lap. She would stroke his hair, he would close his eyes in deep contentment. She would ask, "Are you happy?" and wait with amuse-

ment for his invariable reply, "A child could speak rudely to me now."

They agreed it was a continuing miracle the way they never ran out of something to talk about. During the dreary interlude of separation each would think of so many exciting things to tell the other that it seemed likely not more than half would get related during the winging time of togetherness.

Sometimes they brought along bamboo poles and lines and stuck the poles into the bank, where they could cast a glance at the corks from time to time. Usually, they had little luck, but one day they caught six good-sized white perch. "How do you like that?" said Allen proudly. "We can catch fish right out of our living-room window." For so sweet a thought she kissed his nose. When they got back to her house—they thought of her house as something entirely distinct from *their* riverside home—Allen insisted on cooking the fish himself, his way. Sawyer had never tasted anything so savoury—she told him so.

They hit on a palliative to mitigate the anguish of those days when Allen was so tied up at the office he couldn't possibly get away. Promptly at three o'clock, on such a day, she would leave her carriage a block from the new city hall, and stroll past the four-storey sandstone structure. He would be standing in plain sight at his window on the second floor at the left end. Reaching the next corner, she would snap her fingers, as if she had forgotten something, and retrace her steps. Neither would give any sign of recognition, but they saw—they saw. And that was enough to ease momentarily their loneliness, their lurking fear that the other no longer existed.

And when the telephone system was completed, Allen used his influence to see that she got one of the first residence instruments, and that helped tremendously. He called her every morning at ten, she called him every afternoon at four. Each morning, as the time grew near, she became tense with anxiety. Perhaps he couldn't get out of court, perhaps he had waked up ill and hadn't gone to the office, perhaps—he had simply forgotten. And then, on the dot, the telephone in the hall ringing . . .

Sometimes, taking her unawares, the dark question struck: "Suppose he wearies of you?" And, her knees growing weak, trembling she would implore, "He mustn't. Please, dear God, he mustn't."

They did not go out in public together. For one thing, they were content to keep to themselves. Sawyer by now was indifferent to any opinion of her but Allen's—but she refused to risk his reputation by appearing in public with him. Allen himself had a keen remembrance of Kit Pendleton's admonition that it was his responsibility to safeguard her. He was afraid that, even in public, he could not disguise his possessive pride or conceal a solicitude which would betray the proportions

of their attachment, and thus destroy her utterly. He bitterly resented the common judgment delivered against her by the town, but silenced by the necessity of not revealing undue affection for her, he could only fume. He vehemently wished that she would accept him for her husband, so that he could openly challenge them. As it was, he gave most of his time and thought to surreptitiously seeking evidence that would reverse what he knew must be an unjust sentence. His success was slight.

One day early in May, Kit, while calling on Sawyer, invited her to bring Allen to dinner three evenings thence. Sawyer and Allen talked it over, and, with some trepidation, decided to accept. After all, they concluded, Kit was Sawyer's best friend and Allen and Pen were very close. And if the Pendletons, knowing about them, nevertheless wanted to be friendly, it might be gratuitously unkind to refuse them.

As they reached the porch of the Pendletons' house on the appointed evening, however, they began to regret that they had come. They hadn't faced anybody as a united couple, except for the day in the mountains when neither of them had quite known what they were doing. Suddenly they found themselves in a complex state of bashfulness and reluctance to share their precious secret with others. However, Pen had thrown open the door, and it was too late to retreat.

To their relief, Kit and Pen knew exactly how to act. Had they, wondered Sawyer, talked it over to decide the question? Probably not—it wouldn't have been necessary—they simply instinctively knew. They entertained Sawyer and Allen jollily but casually, as if this evening were no different from other pleasant evenings spent at the Pendletons' house, in other days, and indeed it wasn't. There was one bad moment early, when Pen raised his wine glass in obvious prelude to a toast. Sawyer shot Allen a terrified glance: was Pen going to toast *them*? Of course he didn't. He only proposed a joshing toast to himself relative to his position as manager of the ice and coal plant. "In farewell to Pen the coal man, now 'tis May; in welcome to Pen the ice man, now 'twill soon be hot as Hades again!" They all laughed and drank to that, and before long, Sawyer and Allen were chatting and laughing almost as freely as the Pendletons themselves were. When, later in the evening, Allen happen to reach for Sawyer's hand, as they sat in easy chairs side by side, Pen and Kit accepted the endearment as perfectly natural and paid not the slightest attention.

After departing, Sawyer and Allen agreed that it had been most satisfying to let somebody else see how happy they were. "You were so brilliant all evening, Allen," she said. "How well you talked! I was so proud of you, I could hardly stand it." "I was enveloped in smugness every time I looked at you," said Allen. "'Gee,' I'd think, 'I bet

Pen envies me for having such a beautiful and gracious woman by my side.' ”

Thereafter, the two couples dined together fairly often, and then spent the remainder of the evening in good conversation, or singing at the piano, or playing cards. Kit discovered that love had done nothing to cure Allen's absent-minded habit of trumping his partner's ace, and told him so with some heat. But a little later, she had to agree with Sawyer's triumphant chortling that *her* whist had been improved at least: she and Pen had achieved a slam with most unlikely hands. By then, Sawyer and Allen were as unreserved with Kit and Pen about themselves as any congenial married couple.

And so it went until mid-June.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

ATTRACTED by the racket, Sawyer looked out her sewing-room window and saw the Thurston brothers' horseless carriage jouncing over the rough-graded street behind her house.

She was not particularly surprised to recognise Judge McCrae riding behind the two bankers. Allen had told her a couple of weeks before that the city council had been notified by the Secretary of Interior that Judge McCrae was being sent out. He was to investigate the merits of a petition signed by a majority of the townspeople. The petition pointed out that circumstances had made the Tyndall farm undesirable for residential purposes. It urged that the clause in the Lottery Act which protected the "No. 1" farm by prohibiting further expansion for a period of five years be set aside. The orderly growth and development of the thriving town, it was argued, demanded that some other farm contiguous to the city limits be made available.

Allen had expressed pleasure to Sawyer that Judge McCrae had been the Department attorney selected to investigate and recommend. He felt sure that his friendship with the Judge would lend weight to his own argument against the petition's contention. Sawyer, thinking of the broken engagement with Martha, wasn't so sure.

She really didn't care a great deal which way the decision went, though. She relied on Barney Foster's opinion that the \$81,000 which she had obtained from the bank would, as the result of investment, make her as comfortably well off as one need be. Barney had been forwarding her sufficient funds from her dividends to meet living expenses, and he promised that very soon profits in large amounts would be rolling in. Money matters no longer seemed as important as they once did—she gained a sense of security from another source now.

She had toyed with the idea of turning her financial affairs over to Allen, but for one thing she was afraid Barney might take offence—and rightly, she concluded; he had been zealous and energetic in her behalf. Not only might it be an unfair burden to impose on Allen, but besides, money—particularly, her money—seemed an unsuitable element to bring into their relationship. Better leave her business affairs as they were . . .

The bankers' horseless carriage turned east at the next corner and rolled toward the Goo Goo Avenue honkytonks. Sawyer walked quickly through the house. From inside her front door, she watched the vehicle disappear into the head of the street; then from time to time she glimpsed it through the spaces between dance halls and saloons.

Of course! she thought suddenly. That was why Allen had failed to come out last night, as she had expected him to. Judge McCrae had come to town; no doubt the Dunbars had entertained him at dinner, and Allen had had to spend the evening talking with him. He might have telephoned, though . . .

Reaching the end of the shabby row, the horseless carriage turned again and started west in the direction of her house.

Sawyer hastily untied her black sewing apron and stuffed it behind the hall couch. She puffed up her hair before the mirror. Judge McCrae had once called her "enchanting"; he mustn't be allowed to think her anything less now.

The vehicle stopped before reaching her house. John V. Thurston rose and began gesturing, apparently indicating the different areas of the tract. His seated brother gesticulated and appeared to be shouting over the engine's clatter. Judge McCrae sat stiffly upright, crowded in the middle, hands clasped over a gold-headed cane. From that distance, Sawyer could not read the expression on his face for an idea of his reaction to the bankers' pleas. Remembering how insultingly the bankers had shouted at her on the crowded street that day, she watched their excitement contemptuously. She rather hoped Judge McCrae would recommend the opening of some other farm—it would serve the boorish Thurstons right to be put \$81,000 out of pocket.

Presently, Thomas H. Thurston pulled on the operating bar, the vehicle started with a jerk, turned, and lumbered toward town.

Sawyer felt a little vexed. Why hadn't Judge McCrae come in to discuss it with her? After all, she, too, had an interest in this thing: her land was involved. One might almost think they had snubbed her. She returned to her sewing machine with a frown.

The June morning was oppressively hot anyway. Still and sultry and curiously laden—a static, nervous kind of hovering. Three recent manifestations had taught that in this country late spring and possibly a good part of summer would likely be seasons of sudden, violent windstorms, often accompanied by rain or hail. The transplanted Kansans, who had warned that it would be so, were fully vindicated: they had recommended that every house have a storm cave behind it, that larger storm caves be made available in the business district. The pattern of the storms was fairly predictable: the hot south wind dying, a period of sultriness, then black clouds appearing in the north or north-west and the storm roaring down. The second of the late spring's storms, razing two houses, unroofing half-a-dozen others, and resulting in injuries to several persons, had instilled respect for their power of destruction. On such a day as this, even though one lacked previous experience, there was a sullenness in the atmosphere to make the instinct uneasy.

However, the pale blue sky was cloudless; there was no visible threat anywhere . . .

When the telephone failed to ring at ten, Sawyer was shocked. Never before had Allen missed the daily morning call. She waited until ten-thirty; then, the telephone still obstinately silent, she called his office. There was no answer.

Don't blame him, she told herself; it's something he can't help. It's only this weather makes you fidgety.

Half an hour before lunch-time, she was watering the ivy trailing from wall pots on each of the dining-room window, when she saw a surrey, which she recognised as the Dunbars', entering her land from Plum Street.

At first she thought it might be Allen. Then she saw that the occupants were two well-dressed, middle-aged women. And, as they came up the street, Sawyer perceived that the driver was Mrs. Overton Dunbar. A moment later she recognised her companion: Mrs. McCrae.

Sawyer stepped back from the limp curtains. The surrey drew up before her house.

Heavens! Could it be they were coming to call? She hadn't seen Mrs. Dunbar for months. And as for facing Mrs. McCrae looking like this—

She flew up the stairs and swiftly changed to a prettier dress. She looked out. The two women were sitting in the surrey, talking and looking toward her house. She made sure of her face and hair at the mirror. When she looked out again, the surrey was driving on. It turned west at the corner.

Sawyer ran to the back of the house. Yes, the surrey was turning south and coming along the rear of her block. She could see Mrs. McCrae peering toward the house as both women's mouths moved in conversation.

They proceeded south and re-entered the town.

"Well!" said Sawyer. "I hope you got your eyes full!"

Some time after lunch, she again tried unsuccessfully to reach Allen at his office.

III? Could he be ill?

She had never telephoned him at the Dunbar resident. Tempted, she couldn't quite bring herself to run the risk of her call being answered by some other member of the family.

Sawyer had Joe drive her past the city hall, past Red Holt's café, past the *Sentinel* newspaper office. At none of them, or anywhere along the downtown streets, did she get a glimpse of him.

A blue-black cloud, towering, had formed in the north-west; it lazily convoluted in the pale blue sky. A light breeze, cool, caressed her

cheek. She had better get home to her cellar ahead of it. And Falling Leaf might tell her he had telephoned in her absence.

Then, happening to look back over her shoulder, she saw him. He was standing in the centre of the walk, hands on hips, looking at the show window of Regent Ladies' Wear. Elated, she got down and hurried toward him.

A female figure in a flaring pink skirt and white shirtwaist, twirling a Japanese parasol, moved out of the shade of the Regent's awning and joined him. They came up the street together.

Sawyer's footsteps slowed; she stopped.

Her heart turned to ice.

The coy, upturned face. That plump figure—plumper than a year ago—but still unmistakable—Martha McCrae.

"Why, Sawyer!" exclaimed Martha.

Sawyer did not look at her. Her eyes were on Allen. He flushed before her stare.

"Sawyer Tyndall!" repeated Martha. "I was wondering if I'd get to see you. My, how you've *changed*."

Though she smiled sweetly, her inflection left no doubt that the change in Sawyer had in no way been for the better.

Sawyer's glance swept her. She started to say, "I hardly recognised you either, since your figure's—matured." But she kept her lips tight.

"What do you know?" said Allen. "Martha and her mother journeyed out with the Judge. It was quite a surprise," he added with excessive jollity.

"Yes, I know," said Sawyer. "I saw both the Judge and Mrs. McCrae this morning. They circled my house, at different times, though apparently neither had the leisure to call."

"Well!" said Allen.

Twirling her parasol on her shoulder, Martha smiled up winningly at Allen. "Allen's been showing me the town." Her small pink-gloved hand sliding—loathesomely, thought Sawyer—under Allen's arm and clasping it lightly. "I think you have a most quaint little town here."

"Well!" repeated Allen. "We—that is, Martha just suggested we have an ice cream. Won't you come to Hollaway's with us and have one too, Sawyer?"

"Thank you," said Sawyer. "I have so many important things to do. I'd better run."

She swung on her heel and returned to her carriage.

Allen's hand was under her elbow. She jerked away and started again to get up. She saw Joe was not on the box. He had put the hitching weight down. Where in God's name had he——

"Sawyer," urged Allen. "Please!"

She stared at nothing across the carriage.

Martha came up and touched Allen's arm. He smiled at her. They started off. "It was nice seeing you, dear," said Martha over her shoulder to Sawyer.

Sawyer secretly watched their backs as they continued up the street. They had gone some distance when Allen stopped, said something to Martha, left her standing, and strode back to Sawyer.

Sawyer turned her head away, a hand holding her insecurely perched hat against the stronger breeze.

"Why in heaven's name are you acting like this?" he pleaded, his tone low to avoid drawing attention from the passers-by.

"Where were you last night?" Her tone was low also, but not out of consideration; it was pitched low by fury.

"I couldn't help it. Mother had them out to dinner and ——"

"Was that why you weren't at your office all day? You've been with her all day?"

"But—— What else could I do?"

The sun went out.

"I've no idea. You might have telephoned."

"I started to. But I didn't want to tell you by telephone. I was looking for an opportunity to get away—so I could come and see you and we could talk about it. I was so taken aback, I——"

The rising wind strummed the telephone wires overhead.

She turned to him. "Allen, stop this lying nonsense. Surely you don't expect me to believe that Mrs. McCrae and Martha came all the way out here without sending word ahead."

"If they did send word, Mother didn't tell me of it."

"In a public street, standing arm in arm," she said bitterly.

"How could I help that?"

"Or why should you help it? You've got everything from me you could." The low, hot intensity of her voice almost a mutter: "She's young and fresh. Why shouldn't you pass on to her?"

"Sawyer, you just mustn't——"

"No man would want to marry a woman he's already possessed, would he? No, he'd want a bride who was chaste and pure. Well, you've got her——"

"I'll marry you this minute if you'll say so."

"Very noble. But no thank you."

She whirled to her carriage again, and, as she turned, she glimpsed Martha standing up the street, that hideous parasol on her shoulder, pink skirt fluttering, a set smile on her round face as she watched them.

Sawyer swung back to him. "Kiss me."

"What?"

"I want you to kiss me, right now." Damn a hat that wouldn't stay on by itself.

"I can't do that, dear. Here on the street. Sawyer——"

"Are you going to kiss me?"

"But Sawyer, she's watching. Everybody——"

The hitching weight thumped to the carriage floor. Joe was climbing up to the box.

"Joe, where have you been?" Sawyer demanded sharply. She stepped into the carriage. "Don't you ever leave again without asking permission. Drive me home, please."

Her carriage rolled away.

"Well!" said Allen brightly as he re-approached Martha. "Just as I thought!" He avoided her dangerously narrowed eyes. "Sawyer would have been delighted to have supper with us, but she has another engagement."

Martha opened her mouth to speak, but at that instant a gust of wind swept a swirl of dirt and trash from the gutter. She spat out the filth and dug into her eyes with her handkerchief for the grit.

"May I help you?" asked Allen.

Martha glared at him.

Allen looked at the spread of blue-black cloud twisting and wreathing down the sky. "I'm afraid we're in for a storm. We'd better——"

"Well, I hope it *does* rain!" complained Martha. "I don't see how you people endure this stifling heat!"

"We'd better go back the way we came," said Allen. "I hope," he mused, glancing back in the direction Sawyer's carriage had taken, "that Sawyer gets home in time."

"Why?"

"Well, it's just that uh—she might have left her windows open."

A sound of iron striking iron rang out somewhere near; a like sound farther off joined it.

"What's that din?"

"A warning system we've set up," said Allen "Iron triangles. They're to let people in stores and offices know they'd better get to the storm caves."

"Heavens above!" exclaimed Martha. "What a place!"

He guided her between two buildings. A blast of wind down the passageway stripped Martha's parasol wrong side out.

"Oh, darn!" she cried. "Brand new!" Frantically, she pushed down her skirts.

In an open space behind the buildings, office workers, clerks, and customers were filing into a large cellar. It was filled to capacity before Allen and Martha got to it. They started for another Allen knew of some fifty yards away.

When they reached it, Martha, seeing people disappearing into the darkness below, held back. "I won't go into that hole."

"It's safer, Martha."

"No!"

A close flash of lightning, almost simultaneously a tremendous clap of thunder, and a cloudburst bucketed down on them.

"God in heaven, have mercy!" cried Martha in terror. She ran down the steps.

The shelter was jammed. Martha and Allen were forced to stop at the foot of the stairs. Allen helped another man close the sloping wooden door. A fusillade of hail rattled on it. Somebody lighted the suspended lantern.

Having opened with frightening suddenness, the storm rapidly mounted in intensity. A trickle, then a stream of water flowed over the steps.

"Do you mean to tell me this sort of thing is normal?" asked Martha, wiping the rain from her cheeks.

"Well, it doesn't come very often."

"Once would be too often. I'm simply drenched. Look at my skirt streaking. I wouldn't live in this hole of a town for a million dollars."

"We like it, lady," said someone farther back in the cellar. He was accorded a wave of appreciative sniggers.

Martha reddened.

"Shhh," said Allen in her ear.

"Don't shush me!" she snapped at him. "I say what I like."

The general laughter embarrassed Allen. He stared straight ahead.

The water, rolling down the steps in a torrent, had become an inch deep on the floor.

After a while, when the others had lost interest in them, Allen leaned to Martha and whispered, "I apologise for shushing you so rudely."

"I'm not concerned with your apologies now," she said loudly. "I'm more concerned for my life. Do you realise we're standing in water ankle deep? And that it's still rising? Can you give me any assurance I won't drown?"

"None, I'm afraid," said Allen shortly.

She glared at him.

Presently, she asked, "What are you mumbling, Allen?"

"Nothing."

She whispered fiercely in his ear, "It sounded to me something like hoping that Sawyer Tyndall is all right."

"Very well," he whispered back as fiercely, "I do very much hope so."

"I'm hardly surprised," she whispered. "You've thought of nothing but her all day. You don't care what happens to me. You've tried to rid yourself of me all day. Oh," she said aloud, "I was never so miserable in all my life!"

She remained miserable for some time. The air became stuffy. The water rose almost to her knees. She interpreted Allen's offer to hold her up out of it in his arms as having been reluctantly advanced; she curtly refused. Her lips moved in silent prayer.

And at the end of half an hour the storm ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

They waded out of the water and plodded up the stairs—and stepped into mud ankle deep.

Shingles, broken glass, soaked papers, a drowned chicken, were strewn about. Nearby lay a harness shop sign which had sailed over the roofs from somewhere. Lifting her heavy skirts, Martha threaded her way gingerly. The other people disappeared into buildings or between them. She skidded and would have fallen if Allen hadn't grabbed her.

She tore herself free.

"Allen Dunbar!" she raged; she had to wait until she had gained some control of herself before she could continue. "Allen Dunbar, just look at my clothes—look at my shoes! Do you mean to still tell me that you intend to stay in this abomination of a town?"

"It's my town, Martha—for better or worse."

"Going to carve out your career here indeed!" she snorted. "I know why you're staying—why horses couldn't drag you away."

"Let's not quarrel, Martha."

"You just listen to me! Do you think I'm completely blind? You and that Sawyer Tyndall! Leaving me standing in the middle of the street while you go back and make love to her! Oh yes, your mother told my mother last night about you two—you thought she didn't know, didn't you? I wouldn't *believe* it. But I saw for myself. There's something nasty between you two!"

"Martha, you don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, don't I? Well, let me tell you something, Mr. Allen Dunbar. You're not the only man in the world. There's as good fish in the sea as ever's been caught. *I* didn't want to come dragging out here. I wouldn't run after any man. It was your mother—that's who! Writing my mother and saying she didn't think you meant it, saying that if only you saw me again! Well——"

"Martha, there are people in those buildings upstairs. Please——"

"I don't care *who* hears me. You and that nasty Sawyer Tyndall! I didn't want to keep your old ring." Whipping off her left glove, she began tugging at it. "I wanted to send it back as soon as I got your

letter. But Mother said——” The ring came off. “Here! Take it!” She threw it into the mire. “And don’t you ever speak to me again!”

He stooped to pick it up. Martha tried to kick him under the chin. He avoided the blow, her foot continued upward, she slipped and twisted, and came down on her hands. Allen helped her to her feet. She jerked free of him. Holding her smeared hands away from herself, helpless to straighten her hat, which had flopped over one eye, she cried out: “Allen Dunbar, you stop that laughing!”

“Martha—sorry—can’t——”

“Oh, I wouldn’t have you on a—on a ten-foot pole!” she screamed. “You laughing hyena!”

The McCraes left for Washington the following afternoon. Before they departed, Judge McCrae announced to the newspapers that he would subscribe to the wishes of the majority and recommend the opening of a second farm.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

"BOX wants you," said Falling Leaf.

Sawyer looked up from her book. "I've told you forty-seven times, F.L., I won't talk to him. Tell him again—I'm not in."

"Woman in box."

"Oh."

Sawyer crossed the parlour from the library and went to the telephone in the hall. "Hello?"

"Oh, hello, Sawyer! This is Mrs. Dunbar."

Why was *she* calling. Her voice—pleasant.

"How—how are you?" asked Sawyer.

"Oh, just fine! It's been so long since I've seen you, Sawyer—too long, I was wondering——"

Not my fault you haven't seen me, thought Sawyer. I've been available.

"——why don't you come and see me?"

I?

"Aren't you busy? I mean, entertaining the McCraes?"

"Oh, they've gone. They left on the three o'clock.

Thirty minutes ago.

"They were *so* disappointed to have to go so soon, but Judge McCrae has an important case coming up in Washington, and there seemed no way out of it. Why don't you come over now?"

Why? And why now?

"Well—uh . . ."

Don't be impolite to her . . . she's Allen's mother. What an absurd mess with Allen—and no clear way to end it without confessing I was wrong. Of course, you *were* wrong, completely wrong. My mind simply went dead, seeing her. There was no reason to let her affect you so. You should trust Allen farther than that . . . he was in a hole . . . you could tell even then he didn't want to be with her. Acting like that . . . a spoiled child . . . But this is Mrs. Dunbar . . .

"Well, I don't know, Mrs. Dunbar——"

"We need to have a nice, long talk, Sawyer—for both our good."

Maybe—it's such a silly quarrel—maybe he has asked his mother to try and placate you. Not likely. Funny, the McCraes leaving so soon. But it proves that Allen——

"Did you say now?"

"Yes, dear, at once. There are some things I'd like to talk about with you."

A shaft of suspicion. No—behave. She couldn't possibly—after all,

she had called—and is being nice. A chance to get on happy terms with his mother . . . and with Allen himself—without having to confess to him that you——

“I’d be glad to, Mrs. Dunbar. I’ll be there in less than an hour.”

She decided to wear her severely cut linen suit of powder blue, with a linen shirtwaist she herself had tucked by hand; on her left breast she pinned the gold watch Allen had given her—a lock of his hair was in the back of the case now—and she selected a simple yellow sailor straw with plain white band. She took off her rings, pulled on half-length white gloves, and tucked a white twilled pocket-book under her arm. The total effect she sought was a blend of poised smartness and quiet respectability.

Swinging crisp and clean up the Dunbar walk, she was confident she had achieved the dual effect.

Mrs. Dunbar greeted her smilingly. Conscious of her own calculated attire, Sawyer observed that Mrs. Dunbar had on her basque suit of Caledonian brown—she had probably worn it to the McCraes’ train. “It’s been much too long,” said Mrs. Dunbar, inviting her in.

After seating Sawyer in the parlour, Mrs. Dunbar asked to be excused while she went and put on water for tea. By the time she returned, Sawyer’s flutter of excitement had subsided. She rose as the older woman re-entered the room.

“Sit down, Sawyer,” said Mrs. Dunbar.

Sawyer sank into the overstuffed chair. It was too big; she couldn’t sit up as ladylike as she wished. Mrs. Dunbar seated herself in a straight-backed side chair opposite her. Erect, hands folded loosely in her lap, fingering a handkerchief, she gazed at Sawyer.

And Sawyer saw the polite smile fade, the mouth become grim, the warm light go out of the hardening hazel eyes. Mrs. Dunbar seemed to grow in size; Sawyer felt herself shrinking. The realisation drained her of strength: Mrs. Dunbar had put aside a mask; she now confronted her in the aspect of that most appalling of antagonists: a good Christian woman.

“Shall we go straight to the point?” said Mrs. Dunbar.

“What?”

Mrs. Dunbar considered her words.

“Let me make it clear at the outset,” she said deliberately, “I have no desire to occupy the Seat of Judgment. There is a Higher Being Whose prerogative it is to impose judgment on all of us. I speak only in fulfilment of my duty as a mother—the mother of a son.”

Tiny figures fled in all directions into the shadows of Sawyer’s mind—froze—then fled frantically again . . .

Mrs. Dunbar was going on in the unhurried, calm club woman voice she used to read an essay.

"My son Allen is, I think all will admit, a young man of talent, virtue and promise. He is a man, however, with the normal masculine appetites. Under our present system of morals it is accepted that the most respectable man will be driven from time to time to satisfy those appetites. So long as he does it circumspectly and with due regard, he will escape censure. Properly trained and reared in a Christian home, his will reinforced by his own innate sense of decency, my son Allen has, until recently, controlled manhood's base side to a degree far greater than most."

O God. She knows.

"Almost as if by the design of Providence, Whose ways we are not to know, there is in almost every case a type of woman available—I think I may safely say that in every town, city, and hamlet there will be found at least one woman, living alone, who is willing to offer her body for debauchment, thereby permitting a man to gratify his fleeting but compelling instincts."

Keep quiet now. *Don't flare up.* Your throat's too tight to speak, anyway. She can't know. She can't!

"I may say in passing," said Mrs. Dunbar, her modulation becoming still more musically rich, "that if a woman chooses to sink to such a level, it may well be accepted as her private contract with Satan, not worth the trouble of comment. Odious as such a situation between a man and a fallen woman may be, it is endured by our present society, and may be recognised as ordinary and common. It *may* be, mark you—so long as no hurt, no disheartening, irreparable damage is done to others—or to the other. Do you follow me, Mrs. Tyndall?"

"Not at all——! I'm bewildered. I've no idea what you're talking about——"

"Permit me to proceed. A little more than a year ago my son Allen was engaged to be married to a girl of culture and refinement, the playmate of his happy childhood. As well, he had been tendered a junior partnership in one of the most distinguished law firms in the nation's capital—his rightful reward for long years of arduous study in the halls of the Harvard Law School."

Not "cloistered" halls? asked one tiny figure, pausing, but it fled frantically again in the shadows.

"Though eager to be married and launch his career, out of a fine sense of duty he accompanied his father to this frontier. He planned to remain only a short time, and it appeared that he would be able to do so; but then a scene of evil was unveiled before his eyes, a violent corruption which struck down his beloved brother. Always sensitive to justice, always indignant in the presence of iniquity and wickedness, he re-

pressed, I am proud to say, his understandable eagerness to return to the object of his affection, and donned the shining armour——”

My God! Shining armour. Don't laugh, she'll think you're hysterical. Don't! Don't betray your terror.

“Are you smiling?” asked Mrs. Dunbar.

“Forgive me,” murmured Sawyer.

Nettled, Mrs. Dunbar sought the broken ends of her thread of thought.

“Ah yes. Then—and it is this side of his nature which I, his mother, must be especially careful to give my sympathetic understanding—then, overworked, wearied by his hard tasks, lonely in the separation from the woman he wished for his wife, he met with temptation. Attracted by a pretty face, his appetites, normally controlled, aroused, the low frame of his mind weakening his powers of resistance, he succumbed.”

“Mrs. Dunbar——”

“He permitted himself to be seduced.”

“Mrs. Dunbar.”

“Yes?”

Careful, careful. She is laying a trap. Don't fall into it. Remember, you must protect Allen too. *Careful.*

“I must tell you I'm completely at sea. I hardly know why you brought me here. Do you think you should disclose these—these unpleasant intimacies to me? I must say I can't believe them. Allen is so—— Well, I just haven't the faintest idea of what you're talking about.”

“I am talking, Mrs. Tyndall, about my son Allen and you.”

You let her say it. You gave her the opening to say it.

“Allen and *me*?” Still *greater* incredulity: “Allen and *me*!! Monstrous! I'm certainly not the kind of woman you've described. Mrs. Dunbar, how *could* you? Why, there is nothing between Allen and me! We're no more than good friends——”

She's watching you. Waiting for you to go on. She doesn't know. She's shooting in the dark. Hoping you'll talk yourself into a confession.

“Oh, Mrs. Dunbar, how sorry I feel for you. How you must have suffered, thinking—— How could you have been the victim of such unspeakable misinformation——”

“I am not the victim of misinformation, Mrs. Tyndall. I know whereof I speak. Not sleeping at home three or four nights a week, spending the remainder of his evenings away as well——”

“But—over-night hunting trips—sometimes a room at a hotel, so he can work at night undisturbed—I mean, doesn't he? For you to assume, merely because he——”

“I wish it were only I. Unfortunately, it is the assumption of the community?”

“What?”

"You fools!" said Mrs. Dunbar bitterly. "Don't you think people have eyes? Time after time he has been seen entering your house in the evening and not re-emerging. Once he was seen leaving your house at six in the morning. Don't you think people relish such spying? With what ill-concealed joy they tell me—oh, for my sake! Continually sneaking to a rendezvous on the river somewhere. Don't you think people can see? Did you think they'd construe such clandestine goings on as platonic? And his work, neglecting it utterly—the sly joke of the town. You've made a fool of him!"

You're a fool yourself. An old fool. Do you think I'd give him up after all you've called me? I'd keep your precious son even if I despised him—which, God knows!—I don't.

"Well, Mrs. Dunbar, I'm sure all this has been as unpleasant for you as for me——"

Very good: low and calm; she's done her worst and it wasn't as bad as you feared; you're unscathed; sticks and stones, but words can never—Reach for your pocket-book. You're the mistress of the situation. Now——

"I'm sorry if we have brought you pain. But we're adults, not children. I can see no possible way to——"

"You can give him up. You must."

"Mrs. Dunbar—shall I just tell you frankly? I have no desire to give your son up. I have no intention of doing so."

Magnificent! To your feet now . . .

"Mrs. Tyndall!"

Anguished. Pathetic. Very well. Sit down and let her writhe a little. You can afford to be a little generous now.

"Sawyer——" Oh-ho! So it's "Sawyer" again.

"——my greatest fear was that you didn't love Allen."

"You were afraid I *didn't*?"

"My fear was justified, I see now. Before you came, I told myself if she doesn't love him, there is no chance to save him. If she does love him—enough—there may be a hope of doing so."

What's she getting at now?

"I said to myself, if there is nothing more than carnality in her, then there is no decent, spiritual sense in her on which to rest an appeal. If she and Allen have only been gratifying their fleshly natures——"

"Stop using those vile words, please. It happens Allen does love me. He has a very fine and deep love for me."

"Did he tell you that?" asked Mrs. Dunbar sorrowfully.

"Yes. Many times."

Mrs. Dunbar lowered her head. "Ah, well——" She lifted her head bravely. "If he had so taken advantage of the trusting heart of an

innocent maiden, he could not be forgiven. Surely, though, when speaking in passion to a woman of your experience—surely you know such expressions are no more than exclamations of the moment, not to be——”

“That’s not so. It’s something—something beautiful. You don’t know.”

“I know a great deal more than you think.”

“He has loved me a long time, Mrs. Dunbar, a long, long time. This isn’t recent—it’s only that it’s come to you recently. He has loved me since the day he first met me.”

Mrs. Dunbar’s eyebrows lifted slightly, but she hesitated only momentarily. “Infatuation, yes. Physical infatuation. Oh, Allen is honest—he wouldn’t lie to you deliberately. At the moment of speaking, I’m sure he meant it.” She casually spread her handkerchief over her right hand in her lap. “He would marry you if he could.” She took the plunge. “He asked you to marry him and you refused.”

“How—how did you know that?”

A smile flickered at one corner of Mrs. Dunbar’s mouth. She crossed her fingers under the handkerchief. “Allen told me.”

“What?”

“Didn’t you know Allen always confides in me. From boyhood he has brought his troubles to me. And, Sawyer, he has told me—it hurts to say this—that he asked you to marry him because he felt it his *duty*, after he had—after you and he had—— He’s disturbed. Haven’t you sensed it? He doesn’t see how he can end it. He knows that he is destroying himself. But his gentlemanly instincts will not permit him to tell you the truth.”

“So?”

“Oh, I know it is useless to tell you this. For, not loving him, in the true, spiritual sense, you want only to hold on to him—regardless of the depths it drags him to.” She tightened the crossed fingers, her deeply drawn breath carrying a silent-lipped “Forgive me, Lord” into her chest: “Oh, if I should tell you how Allen wept, telling Miss McCrae why he felt he couldn’t marry her. Like the gentleman he is, he made a clean breast of his infidelity to her. And like the generous person she is, Miss McCrae vowed it made no difference, that she would forgive him, but he——”

“You’re lying.”

Mrs. Dunbar straightened with immense indignation. “Do I appeal to you as the sort of woman who would stoop to falsehood?” The joints in the crossed fingers cracked from the clenching. “I tell you what I saw! The scene was enacted in this very parlour, before my sickened eyes. Those pitiful children—groping! But—but Allen would not permit himself to go to her. He was besmirched, he said. He—I remember, he used the legal term—he said he would be coming to her with unclean hands.”

"Please——"

"Oh, how could it matter to you that he is caught in torment? You are quite secure. He is at your mercy. You may enslave him for as long as it satisfies your passion to do so. The poor, bewitched boy! Of course—if you loved him—if you did—then you could—you *would*—your love would *make* you—save him from himself. For the ultimate testimony of a great love is self-sacrifice. It is the finest part of elevated love! To deny oneself for the benefit of the beloved—ah, that is the very highest expression of love. And you know it is so. If you loved him, you would be willing to lay down your life for him! You would have the wisdom to see your own position: a woman who came out of a disreputable background, who played fast and loose with a fortune, who was ostracised for her misbehaviour by her neighbours, and then fell to become the common gossip of the community. You would know that never, never could he rise so long as you were the stone around his neck."

Sawyer stared, incredulous, at Mrs. Dunbar sitting in supreme dignity, her eyes ablaze as her rich voice rose to climactic intensity. Unable to bear more, Sawyer slowly leaned forward and lowered her face into her hands.

"So burdened, how could he possibly rise?" asked Mrs. Dunbar rhetorically. "Who would let him rise? But if you loved him, ah then," she said compassionately, "you love would cry out to him, Go, my beloved, and soar to your destiny! And, loving, you would find serenity and elation, watching his progress, watching his conquest of the world, because you would know, secretly, proudly, in your innermost heart, that you had played your part in his success—that without your self-sacrifice, your self-denial, he would never have achieved! But," she said, reaching her peroration, "such sublime abnegation requires, of course, the most majestic woman God Himself can create, and the most exalted love our God can put in a woman's heart . . ."

She rose triumphant and stood over Sawyer and put a hand on Sawyer's shaking shoulders. "I did not intend to make you cry, my dear," she said solicitously.

Sawyer looked up from her hands, her face twisted. "Cry? Why, I'm not crying. I'm only trying as hard as I can to keep from laughing!"

Mrs. Dunbar turned pale. She clenched a fist at her breast and stepped back as dramatically as she had been speaking. "You—woman!" she said.

Sawyer got to her feet. "I can't help it," she said, fighting to keep her giggles suppressed. "But all I can think of was what a shame your club-women weren't here to applaud when you finished. Good day, Mrs. Dunbar." And she went out straight-shouldered, without a backward glance.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

BEFORE she had driven many blocks on the way home from Mrs. Dunbar's, the almost uncontrollable need to laugh left Sawyer. She began to realise that none of the content of Mrs. Dunbar's indictment had struck her as laughable—only the manner with which she delivered her information and condemnation had been ludicrous. The wild desire to laugh—after all hadn't it mainly been a frantic attempt to escape the hysteria which threatened when she learned that the whole town knew of her relationship with Allen?

The whole town . . . God in heaven, what would it do to Allen?

During the three months of happiness with him, Sawyer had come to ignore the town completely. Her heart and mind had been concerned only with their love, and all that lay outside the isolation of her and Allen was hazy, like trees glimpsed on a foggy morning. She had supposed that for its part the town was forgetting that she even existed—which was what she wanted; she wanted only to move unseen in their midst while she dwelt with Allen in a secluded paradise. But now . . .

Those two women beating rugs in the backyard—what were they saying as they flailed? "Did you hear the latest—I'm told the last time he didn't leave her house till almost nine in the morning—must have stayed for breakfast."

That woman in the buggy—why had she slapped the reins on the horse's back as she passed. To hurry it up so she could get home to tell her husband, "Saw that Tyndall woman in the street while ago—no, *he* wasn't with her—guess he won't sneak out to her place till after dark?"

Ahead lay the business district, shoppers thronging the walks, traffic moving thick, where the hundreds talked—and whispered knowingly of clandestine meetings and partings.

"Joe!" she cried. "Don't drive downtown. Go around. Go north and then straight home. And hurry."

The Indian boy put the pair into a trot and turned north at the next corner. A woman came out of a front door, saw her, and went back in. A pedestrian at a mailbox tipped his hat—that was no smile—a leer. Boys kneeling around a marble ring stood up as she passed, and one whistled. Until to-day the whistle would have amused her—God, even the children!

On any other day she would have paid no attention to the three farmers talking on the corner, or to the gesture of one pointing in her general direction. No question about it, he had pointed her out. "Yep, there she is—the widow whose bed the city attorney shares." As she

passed they laughed among themselves: one had probably said "Wonder how he likes it?"

"Faster, Joe. Let them run!"

The sleek pair stepped up to a nervous canter. The June breeze chilled her damp brow. Those men painting that house—one's brush kept on, but the others stopped and looked. She turned her face away. "Still flaunting herself in public—don't seem to mind she's ruined him." "Have to tell my old lady I saw her taking the air—she always wants to know the latest."

". . . the common gossip of the community," said Mrs. Dunbar.

"Faster, Joe. I want to get home!"

And Allen. Allen, thinking as she had that no one suspected, going about his affairs with a smile, trying to make the town a better place to live in, considerate of all he dealt with, having no idea of the evil, sly thoughts that were in the minds of all he met, or of the sniggering remarks they made between themselves when he had departed . . . "Looks sort of peaked, don't he? She's leadin' him pretty fast."

Sawyer jumped down at the front walk without waiting for Joe to open the carriage door for her, and fled into the house. As she ran through the hall toward the stairs, she heard a sharp, "Sawyer!"

Allen was rising from a chair in the parlour.

"Oh, Allen!" she cried, turning into the room.

"I've been waiting—it was all my fault—our quarrel," he said, coming to meet her. "She's gone now."

"Who? Martha? Oh, that doesn't matter. Allen——!"

"Sawyer!" Putting his hands on her shoulders, he held her at arm's length. "What's wrong? Are you ill?"

"Ill? I want to die. Allen—it's awful. Everybody knows. They're all talking. It's ruined, Allen—you're ruined!"

"Everybody knows what?"

"About us. They've been watching us, spying on us—it's too terrible—peeking into our windows—every time we've gone to the river——"

"How did you learn this?" he asked quietly.

"It doesn't matter. I *know*. You mustn't be seen here—they saw you come, they're waiting to see you leave. You must go now!"

He turned away from her. Frowning, he picked up a glass swan from an end table, turned it in his hands, and set it down impatiently. "I had hoped you wouldn't find out," he said.

"But I have, and——" She stopped. "Allen? You sound as if—you already knew."

"I did."

She drew back from him, horrified. "You've known? And—didn't tell me?"

"I didn't want it to hurt you."

"Hurt me? What did you—what have you heard them say?"

"Nothing much directly. Except from Mother—but then, a week or so ago, I happened to overhear something in Holt's Café." Embarrassed, he admitted, "I had to knock a man down."

"I can't believe it—that you kept it from me. It's altogether incredible!"

"It was for your sake—for the sake of your happiness—of ours."

"Only the day before yesterday," she cried frantically, "when we went to the river—and loved—you knew then what they'd made it—and yet, you went ahead—and I not knowing, still thinking it was beautiful, and—"

"It was beautiful. And it is!"

She shook her head unbelievably. "Oh no—you couldn't have done that. Not you, Allen. You couldn't have taken me—knowing they were watching."

"Nobody was watching, Sawyer."

"In effect they were. They knew we were there."

"But we were alone—so long as it wasn't anything less than perfect for you——"

She backed away from his approach, a hand out to push him away. "Don't come near me."

"Sawyer——"

"Why did you let us go on? That's what I can't understand. Why?"

"Because I knew when we were married, that would silence them!" he said harshly.

"*Married?*" She stared with widened eyes. "Do you think I could marry you—after *this*?"

"Yes!" Angry, he knocked away her outstretched arm and embraced her roughly. "You're going to marry me. Nobody's going to prevent it. You're mine and you're going to stay mine!"

"Let me go!" She tore herself free and retreated slowly toward the hall. "I want you to keep away. It's all so vile—it was from the moment you knew what I'd become for you in their eyes and still let me go on in ignorance."

"That's nonsense. How could gossip change what you really are—change our love for each other? When you're my wife——"

"Your wife?" She laughed hysterically. "Your bride? Can you see me going up the aisle, so demure, so sweet? 'Well, he's making an honest woman of her. She was fallen, but he's lifting her to some kind of respectability. How noble of him!'"

"Damn it, Sawyer, if you think it would be like that, we'll leave here if you want. We'll go anywhere! What matters but us being together?"

Retreating, ready to repulse him if he tried to seize her again, she

reached the foot of the stairs and felt for the rail. "Oh yes," she said bitterly, "now you're admitting it. We couldn't stay here. We'd have to leave. Confess your disgrace, desert your office, turn tail and run—because of me!"

"To hell with my office—I can be a lawyer anywhere—or be anything else! What does that matter?"

She backed up two stairs. "First one town, then another, and another, as love turns to hate. I'd had some experience with that. In your heart saying, 'If it hadn't been for her—she brought me to this—the cause of my shame, my failure——'"

"You're completely wild, Sawyer—for Christ's sake!"

"Not wild, my dear," she said, from an elevation of half-a-dozen steps above him. "You're not going to be noble for *my* sake. *I'm* the one who's going to be noble for yours. It's a woman's duty. 'Go, my love, and soar to your destiny!' How do you like that? That's known as self-sacrifice. It takes a noble woman, did you know it, to say that? Yes, 'the most majestic kind of woman our God can create.' That's me. It's because, you see," she said mockingly, "I love you so much." She called out: "F.L.! Oh, Falling Leaf!" She stared down at Allen, looking up pale from the foot of the stairs. "You can go back to your town now and ask their forgiveness for letting yourself be seduced by a debauched woman. They'll understand and forgive—you're a man. Yes," she said, and, as overwhelming as was her grief, she couldn't ignore the thrill it gave her to say it, "you're free to soar!"

He started up the stairs.

"Stay down there. I mean it. It's over. And go."

Falling Leaf waddled in from the kitchen. "What's the holler?"

"Mr. Dunbar is ready to leave. Show him out."

She turned and walked up the remaining stairs with dignity, trying vainly to see through her tears as she ascended.

The next two weeks were not separated by days and nights: light and darkness blended to a grey in which she moved or lay inside her house. There were events, or incidents, streaking the timeless twilight, but she could not say just when each occurred or in what order. On which days had his letters come, and had she really handed them unopened to Falling Leaf to burn? Which day was it she knelt out of sight behind the upstairs banisters and heard his voice as he told Falling Leaf, who blocked the door, that he didn't believe she wasn't in? And was it every day the telephone rang, Falling Leaf saying, "She not here; she say you keep out of box," until F.L. rebelled against answering? And she left the receiver off, and couldn't bear the silence, and put it back, and when it rang again, she had silently lifted the receiver and listened:

"Hello. Hello! Sawyer, is that you?" And she had hung up—which day was it that occurred?

Answering the door herself when she saw Kit drive up in front. "I can't see you, Kit. I don't want to see anyone. I can't discuss it." "But Sawyer, he begged me to come and see you!" "I supposed he had. Don't think I'm unkind if I don't ask you in." And closed the door against her friend.

So fantastically confused were her thoughts that, finally, when she had narrowed to two her possible choices for the future, one was a plan to take Falling Leaf and go to live secluded in the south of France, and the other was to enter a convent. She knew she would do neither, but the imagining brought a sad, sweet poignancy to her apathy. Allen's future she could see more clearly, in a variety of scenes. She might be listlessly combing her hair when her drawn reflection in the mirror would be replaced by an image of jurors sitting rapt in the great marble courtroom as he paced before them pleading for the life of his rich client; she huddled, unknown to him, in the packed row of eager spectators . . . her sacrifice had made this great moment possible for him. Or as she dully ate a solitary luncheon, her chewing would slow, pause; his colleagues in the Senate awed as his oratory thundered . . . over there his wife and six children looking down at him . . . but they had nothing to do with his success—it had been the abnegation of that lone woman in black sitting in the gallery opposite, leaning forward with secret pride . . .

And then, one day, F.L. came into the library where she was reading without knowing the content of what she read, and said that Barney Foster was at the door. She shook her head; then, hesitating, she laid the book aside. "Tell him to come in here, please."

She saw the shock on his face when, as he entered, he noticed how wan she was. "Sawyer!" he said solicitously, coming to her swiftly, and, when she held out her hands taking them and pressing them earnestly. "Your hands are like ice."

"Sit down, Barney," she said, and when he had sunk down beside her, she said quietly, "I didn't think you'd come."

"I didn't think you wanted me to—that was the only reason. I wanted so to comfort you."

"Barney, I'm no good. Completely and utterly no good."

"Oh, no," said Barney gravely, "I'll not accept that. You've made a mistake—a mistake of the heart."

"Did you know all along of—about me and——"

"For quite a while."

"And you said nothing to me? You didn't reprove me?"

"It was your affair. I was hurt grievously, of course—you know my sentiments for you—but it was your choice. I was afraid it would lead to disaster, but even a friend can't advise in a matter like that."

"How did you know it was over?"

"The same as everybody does. You aren't seen together. You haven't left your house. He hasn't entered your house. There's no escaping the prying eyes of a small town."

"Oh, Barney," she cried. "I've made such a mess of my life. I came here with such dreams, such hope. How did I throw it all away?"

"Not your fault, Sawyer. The kind of person you are—you weren't meant for a small town like this. There's too much to you."

She shook her head doubtfully. "There was a promise, though. A promise of something worthwhile. What did I let happen to it?"

"It wasn't your fault. The people here——"

"No," she said, "I'm tired of blaming others for my own failures. I simply failed."

"It was *them*," he insisted. "I've put up with them for a year. I gave them a start with their government—*that* much about their town is good, anyway. And now that I've finished my part of the work, I'm pulling out."

She looked at him stunned. "Barney!"

"Don't mention it—under any circumstances. But I've had my fill. I'm going to give them a Fourth of July speech day after to-morrow—a dandy farewell speech, though they won't know it's that!—and I'm leaving next day. That's very confidential, dear."

"You can't, Barney. You can't leave! You're all I have left. Everything else is shattered. I didn't realise it till you came just now—but somehow in the back of my mind, I've known I had you left—that I could count on you."

"I've got to go, Sawyer," he said gently. "I have other things to do. I'm going to New York."

"So far?" she said wistfully. She gazed at the floor. "There's nothing left here for me. Tell me," she asked, "a single reason why I should continue living here."

"I can think of none."

"No. Not one." She lifted her head and looked the green, black-flecked eyes regarding her intently. "Barney, maybe you wouldn't want to—and I know I've no right at all to ask you, but more than once, in the past, you've——" She struggled to go on.

"Yes?"

"In spite of the way I've treated you, could you——" She reached for his hand; he took hers and pressed it encouragingly. "Take me with you, Barney," she pleaded.

His expression did not change. "Are you sure you mean it this time?"

"I'm sure, Barney."

"Are you sure you don't still love him?"

"Do I have to answer that?" she asked pathetically.

"No. But I must tell you one thing, my darling. It's only fair to tell you. I'm fonder of you than any woman I ever knew—but I'm not the marrying kind."

Her lips trembled. "But you'll cherish me, won't you, Barney?"

"Yes."

"That's all I want, and I don't deserve even that." She gave him a reassuring little smile. "Tell me what it will be like?"

"New York?"

"Yes. And us. Tell me in detail—so I can be looking forward to it," she said.

He told her. He described the apartment she would have, the gay and bright night life they would become a part of, the fine clothes and jewels he would deck her in, the envy which even the most beautiful women of New York would have when they saw her attired and escorted as she would be . . . "Does all this please you?" he asked.

Her gaze distant, she murmured. "I think that will be all right." *Who is that fabulously gowned creature coming out of Delmonico's? Why, don't you know—that is the celebrated Sawyer Tyndall, mistress of the eminent politician, Barney Foster; he keeps her in the most sumptuous flat in New York, and worships the ground she walks on.* "Yes," she repeated in a whisper, "I think that will be all right."

Barney put an arm around her shoulders and sought her lips.

"Please, Barney," she said softly, and when his eyes narrowed, she said, "Let's wait until this unhappy place is behind us—and it's just us."

"Very well," he said. "But at least I'll kiss away those teardrops on your lashes. They're never to appear there again." He brushed her eyelids with his lips, and kissed her forehead, and her hair, and got to his feet. "You have only three days to get ready—so perhaps you'd better begin packing. Remember, it's our secret."

She decided to take only three trunks and leave all her other clothing to Falling Leaf to keep for herself or distribute to her kinfolk. They packed in Sawyer's bedroom, Falling Leaf greedy whenever a piece of clothing, an evening gown, a petticoat, a pair of shoes, fell to her.

Sawyer was on her knees before a trunk when Falling Leaf came from a closet with a battered brown velvet hat with a gold arrow thrust through the folds. "You don't want this old dirty thing," she said. "I keep it."

Sawyer took it from the woman. She caressed its folds. Their first time . . . in the little canyon. “. . . a hallowed spot for us . . . like a cathedral . . . we will return . . . and walk soft and speak low . . .”

“I’ll keep this, F.L.” She started to put the battered hat in the trunk. Suddenly, she thrust it into Falling Leaf’s hands. “I don’t want it; you may have it.” Abruptly, she got up and left the room.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

DICK ROBINSON leaned against the jamb of the open doorway of Allen's office. Allen glanced up from his desk, mumbled, "Good morning," and went on with his work.

Robinson shook his head. "I'm going to start calling you Arckie. Short for Archetype of Gloom."

"Have a seat."

Robinson pulled up a chair, tilted back in it and put one foot on Allen's desk. He rolled a cigarette and brushed the flecks of Duke's Mixture from his lap.

Somewhere outside the open window a firecracker banged.

"Big Fourth to-morrow," said Dick. "Gala picnic on the school-house grounds, gunnysack race, blind man's buff, band music, and an oration from that eminent friend of the peepul, Mayor Barney Z. Foster, telling us how fortunate we are to live in this gre-a-a-at and glor-r-rious country and this fa-i-i-r and mo--o-odern city—and especially how fortunate we are to have such a brilliant and ho-o-nest statesman for our mayor. You wouldn't miss being there to hear our mayor, would you, Arckie?"

"Not for anything."

"And to-morrow evening, to the accompaniment of fireworks' red glare, formal opening of the new municipal power plant, which cost only the mere pittance of twice its worth, with electric lights going on in many of our fairest homes, our beautiful White Way lit up for the first time and inducing forgetfulness of cost, our glittering trolley making its first run, with one copy of a bribe-bought franchise per passenger, and a street dance to celebrate Good Government, Independence, and Progress. You'll be at the street dance, I trust?"

"Probably not."

"What? Not join in the festive occasion to mark our unalloyed triumphs of the past year?"

Allen shrugged without looking up.

"Ah, come on, snap out of it. What's new on the Trevaine-Cook killings?"

"Nothing that I know of. Dince is coming by—he's late now—to tell me if he was able to learn anything out there."

"That Cook picked a hell of a time to get himself killed."

"One hell of a time," said Allen. "It's the kind of luck we've played in the the whole way."

"And you're pretty sick of it," said Dick.

"Yes."

"So am I."

They heard quick, perky steps coming down the hall.

"That sounds like Dince."

Roland Clayton Dince appeared in the doorway. His eyes bright behind the steel-rimmed spectacles, his bristles spittle-stained . . .

"Well?" said Allen.

"Well, not much," said Dince.

"Shut the door, anyway. Have a chair."

Seating himself, the photographer put his grimy panama on the desk and rubbed his bristles thoughtfully.

"Here's the best way it seems to figure out, judging from what the girls say they heard. About ten o'clock last night they could hear Cook and Trevaine arguing in her room—her dwarf was in there too—and Cook and Trevaine started cussin' each other——"

"What were they arguing about?"

"Well, that's the trouble. Cook was giving her billy hell about something, but nobody seems to have understood their words."

"But that's what we've got to have!" said Allen.

"I done my best," said Dince. "Well, the girls heard what sounded like a fist on a jaw and then there was this funny animal cry and this one pistol shot and in about a second there was two shots that sounded different from the first one. You can figure it yourself——"

"The dwarf shot Cook for socking Cecilia Trevaine," said Dick, "and Cook stayed conscious long enough to kill them both. You can read that much in my paper this afternoon."

"Well," said Dince, "when nothing else happened in there, the girls finally persuaded the perfesser to kick the door down, and there was the three of 'em, sprawled out. Cook lived for thirty minutes——"

"Twenty," corrected Dick.

"Did he say anything?" asked Allen.

"Not's I can find out. He likely didn't. The Doc took a derringer slug out of his head and it was a derringer the dwarf used. Cook's little Saturday night pistol had been fired twice."

"I'm afraid I know that much, Dince," said Allen, "but," he persisted, "didn't the girls understand a single word of what Cook was giving Trevaine billy hell for?"

"If they did, I couldn't get 'em to say so. And I spent five dollars on drinks."

Allen took a five-dollar bill from his wallet and handed it to Dince.

"Even the U.S. marshals consider the case closed," said Dince.

"Everything's closed," said Allen. "Everything!"

"Now, Allen——" began Dick.

"Same old story," said Allen. "Just as it looks as if we have some-

thing, blooey!—right in our faces. We know damn good and well that Cook was being paid regularly by every operator out there. Why?"

"Well," said Dick, "he did get those sites for them."

"But how?"

Dick shrugged.

Allen's eyes narrowed. "I think I've made it clear, Dick, that any insinuation——"

Dick grinned. He picked up a palm fan from the desk and tossed it to Allen. "Cool yourself off. I didn't say anything."

Allen ran a finger down the edge of the fan. "Cook wasn't the top man. He wasn't bright enough. He was a go-between. He was collecting that money for somebody else——"

"We don't know. We only suspect. And suspicion isn't worth a plugged nickel. Well," he said, "thanks, Dince, anyway. You found out a lot for us—when you learned Cook's real job I thought we were getting somewhere—but now that he's dead—Drop in if you learn anything new. I'd especially like to know if Foster or any of the councilmen send any more money to northern banks by Wells Fargo."

Dince didn't move to get up. He smiled slyly. Allen looked at him inquiringly.

"I got a little somethin' else," said Dince. "Maybe it don't mean nothin' though."

"What is it?"

Dince reached into his coat pocket and took out a photograph.

"Yesterday afternoon I was going around taking pictures of new buildings—I'm getting up a scenic postal folder of the town. I had my camera lined up on the new First Church and while I was under the cloth focussing I thought I heard a back door slam but I didn't pay any attention at the time. When I developed my picture this morning—well, look."

Allen accepted the photograph. Dick got up and came around and looked over his shoulder.

The photograph showed the new brick church and a part of Reverend Haley's residence next door.

"Do you see?" asked Dince. "That man walking out between the church and the preacher's house?"

Dicked leaned closer. "That vest——"

"It's Ollie Cook," said Allen.

"Thought 'twas," said Dince.

"I knew it!" said Dick Robinson. "I've tried to tell you all along and you wouldn't believe it!"

"I still don't, I'm afraid."

"In the name of God, Allen Dunbar, how can you be so dense?"

"Look, Dick. You have plenty of reason to be sore at Haley. So have I—I don't like him either. But——"

"Has the Reverend Mr. Haley ever once raised a voice against this administration? Its crooked sewer contracts, its reeking deals with contractors, its bribe-taking, its——"

"Why should a minister concern himself with politics? A congregation doesn't like it."

"But, damn it, he *has* concerned himself. Regularly, he makes an oblique reference to the fine progress of our town, the efficiency of our administration—he's complimented Foster by name. If I were Foster and had Haley on my payroll I'd compliment *him* for doing a good job. It was always clear to me he was an old hypocrite."

"He's an old hypocrite," agreed Allen. "I think he's a disgrace to the ministry. But that doesn't prove he's a crook."

"Why was Ollie Cook coming out his back door?"

"I don't know that he was."

"I heard a door slam back there somewhere," insisted Dince.

"Could you swear it was Haley's back door? Look fellows, just because a crook is walking out between a church and a preacher's house, you can't convict the preacher himself of a crime. There's such a thing as evidence."

"There's such a thing as a hunch, too," said Dick.

"But when a hunch is based on prejudice—— Dick, don't think I'm keen to defend Haley. This is personal, but I'll tell you: a couple of weeks ago he and I met on the street and he tried to stick his nose into something I consider my personal business. I probably was a little rude to him, and when he persisted, I told him I had more important things to think about—cleaning up the city's affairs, for one thing."

"You did?" Dick's eyes flashed. "And what did he say to that?"

"Oh, I don't know——"

"But the expression on his face? Didn't it change? Did he look nervous? Or startled?"

Allen laughed. "Sherlock Holmes!"

Dick leaned back irritably. "Allen, I think you spoke the truth one day when you said you felt your forte was civil law. You lack the bloodhound's sharp nose to make a prosecutor. Listen!" He pulled a soft pencil from his pocket and began chewing on it. Allen recognised the gesture: Dick's habit when planning a blasting editorial.

"I'm listening."

"Do something—just for me. I want you to telephone Reverend Haley and——"

"Does he have a telephone?"

"You can ask the operator. I want you to call him up. Tell him you're

calling to apologise for being rude to him the other day but that you—but that at that time a chance you thought you had to uncover a graft ring and set the town on its ears had blown up on you, and you were chagrined about it. Now, however, you feel a lot more cheerful because—because you have new evidence you're pretty sure will turn the trick—and so you're taking time to call him and apologise."

"Watson," smiled Allen to Dince, "the needle."

"I just want you to listen carefully to what he says when you tell him you think you're going to nab the gang."

"Oh, for——"

"Go ahead." He spat out a piece of pencil wood. "Just for me."

Allen reluctantly picked up the telephone. He ascertained that Haley did have a telephone and asked that it be rung. Haley at last answered, and Allen in substance delivered the story outlined by Dick.

"Ask him what he thinks," whispered Dick.

"Don't you think it will be a very fine thing for the town when—I see . . . Yes . . . Thank you . . . Thank you very much . . ."

Allen hung up.

"Well? Did he stumble over his words? Was he taken aback?"

"No, and he was not."

"What did he say?"

"He said in effect that he was overjoyed that the forces of goodness and light were about to prevail. He congratulated me most heartily. He boomed congratulations at me."

Dick sank to his chair. "Damn him!"

"Now if you two don't mind, I've got an ordinance regulating the keeping of pigs in backyards to finish drawing up."

Dince rose.

"Thanks for the photo," said Allen. "I'd like to keep it." Dince nodded. "And leave the door open, will you? It's too hot."

Dince went out dispiritedly.

Dick Robinson kept his seat, brooding darkly.

Allen began writing on a piece of foolscap . . .

Each was so absorbed in his own thoughts that neither heard the solid, confident footsteps approaching until they paused at the doorway.

"Well!" said Barney Foster heartily, lifting his white hat and scratching his head. "Don't you two Galahads know it's time to grab a bite to eat? Or does having to eat your own words all the time satisfy your stomachs?"

"One-syllable words do," said Dick Robinson, "if there's pepper and salt."

A string of firecrackers sputtered somewhere outside.

"Listen!" said Foster, sauntering into the room. "Some desperate, corrupt boy of twelve shooting fireworks on the *third* of July. Don't you think you ought to run out and tell him he must wait till the Fourth?"

"Heh-heh-heh," said Dick. "You're in top form to-day, Mr. Mayor."

"Mr. Dunbar doesn't seem to have as high an appreciation of my humour. I don't believe he likes it."

Allen put his pencil aside and leaned back smiling, hands clasped over his head. "On the contrary, Barney," he said pleasantly, "I think you're sidesplitting."

Both men smiling, for a long moment their eyes were locked in combat. Dick Robinson waited.

Barney Foster laughed. He reached into a vest pocket.

"Here, boys, have a cigar."

Dick accepted one of the pair and put it on the desk. Allen leaned forward, took the other, and stuck it in his mouth. Foster struck a match on the underside of the desk, held a light for Allen, and lit up himself.

"Boys," said Foster genially, "I'm glad I saw you together here. I've been wanting to tell you there were no hard feelings. You put up a good fight and you provided me with a lot of entertainment. It wouldn't have been half as interesting without you to spar with."

"Glad we're giving you such a hilarious time," said Dick.

"There always were two parties in politics," Foster went on airily. "You boys just happened to be on the side that was pulling backward. I'd have thought you'd have got awfully tired of it, though, not doing anything but complaining."

"Complaining?" asked Dick.

"While you were complaining this past year, I asphalted twenty-four miles of street."

"At how much a yard?" said Dick.

"That's right—complain. While you were complaining, I—and the council, of course—built this magnificent city hall."

"For how much?" asked Dick. "And a city hall three times bigger than the town could need for twenty years no matter how much it grew. How many empty rooms in it?"

"Sure—complaining. It's a magnificent edifice the people are proud of. A monument to their perseverance."

"Mmm-hmm," said Dick.

"Let me give you a subject for an editorial," said Foster expansively. "Call it 'Complaining never built anything.' You see that street-lighting system out there? And look, you can see the power plant smoke stack from here. Think complaining would ever make that smoke come out of it. I gave 'em the finest deep well pumping plant and water system

in the South-west. Show me a town in the country with more modern, up-to-date improvements and I'll kiss you. What did you build, Mr. Editor with a boil on your butt, or *you*, Mr. City Attorney——"

"I think you're probably right," said Allen.

"What?" said Foster.

"I must have misunderstood you, Allen," said Dick.

Allen examined the gold band on his cigar and slid it off. "What if all of it did cost a few dollars more?" He ran the paper band down his forefinger and held it up to look at. "So long as the people had a government that competently gave them all the services they desired—what do they care?"

"That's a fine way to talk," said Dick.

Allen swung in his swivel chair and gazed out the window. Main Street merchants had lined the walk with American flags on staffs. Bunting draped the cornices of buildings. A temporary bandstand was being erected in the middle of the street for the pavement dance. Though the pace of traffic and pedestrians on this hot July day was not fast, it moved with a purposefulness which spoke of a thriving, growing town.

"Who appointed us to criticise the administration?" asked Allen. "The people didn't kick——"

"You know better than that."

"They didn't kick hard—not hard enough to do anything about it. Our friend Barney here could be re-elected to-morrow." Allen said pleasantly, swinging around into the room again. "He gave them paved streets, water, sewers, and electricity. He gave it to them fast. They liked what they got. There are cities in the East that won't have as wide a use of electricity for a decade."

"You know *why*," said Robinson hotly. "It's only because in the older cities capital investment tied up in lighting systems such as gas *can't* change fast. We started from scratch. We could start with the latest and newest. But what is an electric bulb in your parlour if to put it there required——"

"But suppose the people didn't care?" persisted Allen. "Mr. Foster's right. The people will say he was a good mayor."

Foster was watching Allen carefully. "If you don't mind, Mr. Dunbar," he said at last, "I wish you'd stay off my side."

Allen laughed, and Foster, realising it was a pretty good remark, chuckled also. "Well, boys," he said, waving goodbye with his cigar, "it was pleasant seeing you."

He strode out. In a moment his booming laughter rolled tauntingly up the hall.

Robinson glowered at Allen. "You traitor."

"Why, don't you think Foster's a man for the history books?"

"He's an unadulterated son-of-a-bitch and you know it."

"I know one thing very well," said Allen suddenly. "Every time you get your neck out trying to do something to save other people you usually get it cut off—cleanly—by the very people you were trying to help. This is my second go at altruism, Dick—you'd think I'd learn."

"I wish you'd learn you aren't worth a darn to yourself or anybody else, the frame of mind you've been in the last three weeks. I wish to heaven you'd snap out of it."

Allen started to put the cigar in his mouth, looked at it, and tossed it into the spittoon. He squinted his eyes thoughtfully. "You're the detective, you should have noticed——"

"Noticed what?"

"The peculiar way Foster phrased most of what he had to say. His use of the past tense. As if it was all over as far as he was concerned—as if he was through with being mayor. You might have thought he was about to, shall we say, depart from our midst."

"He said, 'You put up a good fight and provided me with entertainment—it wouldn't have been half as much fun without you.' Why should he assume the fight's over. He said a couple of other things phrased in the same manner. And when I took him up and said a few things like 'The people didn't kick—they liked what they got' and so on, Foster didn't challenge me on the past tense."

"That's pretty tenuous, isn't it?"

"Yes—but I've had my ears tuned to every word that man has said for so long—hoping and waiting—— Well, he doesn't make slips like that often . . . Anyway, let's go get something to eat."

Returning to his office at one o'clock, Allen couldn't keep his mind on pig-sty prohibitions. Finally, he pushed the papers away. He swung in his chair and looked out on Main Street. There were a good many people on the street, but nowhere the one figure his eyes sought.

He turned back to his desk and pulled out the top left drawer. He pushed aside Dince's church photograph and took out another. There were two people in the photo, but he ignored himself. He gazed at the likeness of the trim girl seated beside the likeness of himself before the tepee. Feet crossed under her skirt, feathered headdress trailing, cheeks sucked in from the pretence of drawing on the long peace pipe she held, mischievous eyes cut to the camera . . .

Still gazing, he reached for the telephone. He had half lifted the receiver when he came to and let it fall. He dropped the photo into the drawer. Elbows on the desk, clasped knuckles to his lips, he brooded . . .

The telephone bell made him jump. "Yes?"

"Mr. Dunbar?"

"Yes. Who is it?"

"Is there anyone with you?"

"No."

"Do you recognise my voice now?"

"I think so . . . Yes."

"I should like to see you."

"When?"

"Immediately."

"Why?"

"Come by, please. It's urgent."

The broken connection clicked in Allen's ear. He sat for a moment, then got up and went for his hat. On an impulse, he returned to his desk and took out the church photograph and put it in his pocket . . .

The Reverend Mr. Haley quickly answered his knock. "Come in, please!" he urged. Pink face redder than usual . . . perspiring . . . altogether from having to wear black in summer? . . . the hand which took the hat trembling . . . two valises at the back of the hall . . . were they packed?

Mr. Haley showed him into a darkened parlour, shades drawn. On a small table by the leather armchair a half-eaten sandwich and a glass of milk . . .

"My little lunch," explained Mr. Haley. "I let my housekeeper go. Sit down, please. I haven't much time . . ."

Allen sank to the indicated settee. Mr. Haley started to sit in the leather chair; distractedly, he got up at once and paced the length of the room and back, hands fidgety behind him. Allen kept speculative eyes on him. Apparently having composed himself somewhat, Mr. Haley divided the skirts of his coat, and sat. He leaned forward, hands on knees, elbows akimbo.

"Mr. Dunbar—what I have to say is difficult."

"Is there any way I can make it easier for you?"

"Nothing can. You are a man of considerable experience, however—and I hope you will be tolerant of my words."

Allen said nothing.

"The most virtuous of us commit errors. Errors of judgment, errors of the heart—of the flesh."

Allen's tone was sharp: "If you are about to——"

Mr. Haley held up a square hand. "I take it you consider yourself a moral, decent man. Being a man, of course, you have an appreciation for a pretty face, a neatly turned ankle. You can understand how——"

Allen got to his feet. "I think I can anticipate you. I thought I told you once before——"

He started for the hall.

"Wait!" cried Mr. Haley. The preacher sprang to his feet.

"Sorry, but I consider my personal affairs just that—personal."

Mr. Haley lumbered to him. "For God's sake, Mr. Dunbar, I appeal to you— You misunderstand!"

Allen jerked the photograph from his pocket. "Occupy yourself with this. A picture of your church and house taken yesterday afternoon." Mr. Haley took it and looked at it blankly. "Its beauty is a little marred, of course," said Allen, "by the person of one Ollie Cook coming out of your house."

The picture dropped from Mr. Haley's fingers. He stared at Allen.

"You don't have to intimidate me," he said pleadingly. "You don't have to try to frighten me! I was going to tell you, anyway. That's why I called you here! I'm not frightened of man—it's my God I'm frightened of. It isn't because you *know* that I called you—it's for the sake of my soul!"

Allen sucked in a deep breath.

"Sit down, Mr. Dunbar, for God's sake!"

"You sit down, Mr. Haley," said Allen quietly.

As he re-seated himself, Mr. Haley pulled out a handkerchief and mopped his florid face. Allen stood before him, hands on hips, and waited.

"I must ask one promise of you," said Mr. Haley hoarsely. "I'm leaving town this afternoon. You must promise not to detain me. I can't face it. He'd kill me! I'll tell you all you need to know, enough to clear my conscience and satisfy my God, but I must be allowed to depart. Somewhere, perhaps, I can—I've prayed all day! Ever since I heard—I must confess my sins. It's my only possible salvation. God has told me. I must reveal all. I'm a man damned sir, listen to me, please——"

"I'm listening, Mr. Haley."

"Promise! State's evidence, that's it. If a man turns state's evidence he is allowed to go free, isn't it?"

"Sometimes. Sometimes it mitigates."

"But if he *repents*! Our Saviour asks no more of a man. Promise you'll let me go in peace."

"I'll make no promise until I've heard what you have to say."

"You will. I know you will! I have erred. Grievously. In my past. I was humbly repentant. A pretty choir singer or two—women of musical inclination are frequently—it was of small importance—But where could I preach? Nowhere a church. It was all I knew, all I wanted—spreading the Gospel. And I had not sinned, not a sin of the flesh, in a long, long time. But I fell into the power of a man who knew of my past." He mopped his face. "You don't know what a tragedy this is for me, Mr.

Dunbar. I have built up a fine congregation. I have a wonderful church—beautiful yellow brick. I could do the Lord's work here—oh, I could! To desert it, to flee like a fugitive in the night—oh, mercy, mercy! But I can't face it. And I can't remain silent. Much I could stand, for after all what is politics? But murder! No, no, I can't be a party to murder."

"Whose?"

"That abominable Trevaine woman."

"What do you know about it?"

"Oh, listen to me! I'm not guilty. I'm not. When I assented it was only because—— But I'm not guilty!"

"Try to be more coherent, Mr. Haley."

"Blackmailed me! Yes, she tried to! Right in this very room. That evil, painted Jezebel, that stinking, rotten woman! Oh, but don't speak of the dead. She *knew*. She knew all about me. And she wanted money to keep silent. Oh, to be at the mercy of a whore! I thundered at her, I ordered her from my house, but inwardly I quailed, I was afraid. That fool! He had to confide in her, just because he shared her bed. He had to boast to someone—and he chose her!"

"Who is *he*?"

"Don't you know?"

"I want you to tell me."

Haley licked his lips. "Then I asked him to come here."

Allen's brows knitted. "Cook?"

"No, no. He came later in the day, to ascertain her very words. That pimp and bawd Cook!" he said contemptuously. "He poked fun at me, at my calling, taking out his pistol, asking if I wanted to do it myself. Ah, the agony of association with such scum."

"But the man you first summoned—the booster. Who was he, Mr. Haley?"

"Ah yes! I repeated to him what had occurred with that Trevaine woman. Ah yes! he had confided it all to her—or enough. I tell you, woman is the downfall of man. He swore when I told him of it—ah yes, too late! She was going to the others, she intimated to me, and quietly blackmail them too. He was in a fury. 'I'll kill her,' he said, and called her a fearful name. I protested against violence. I did! He leered at me and asked if I didn't want her killed—so I'd be safe. I didn't—but men like to poke fun at preachers—I had to pretend I was a man. But I didn't assent—not really—I didn't! And he had that Cook kill her. He——"

"Barney Foster?"

The name, as quietly as Allen spoke it, stopped Haley in mid-sentence . . . mouth open, eyes wide, pink cheeks haggard.

"Yes," he whispered.

Allen expelled a long breath. "Go on . . ."

"Believe me, Mr. Dunbar, I am not a murderer. Oh how I've prayed!"

"I want to hear more about Foster."

"The man's tools—that what we all were. He had me in his grasp. O, what he promised! An opportunity to redeem myself, a pulpit, a new opportunity in life. A pulpit from which to do the Lord's work. And I have—haven't I been a good pastor, Mr. Dunbar?"

"No. I want to hear about Foster."

"You're right—what a sinner I've been. This diabolical organisation—holding me—the town!—in its clutches. And now I've told you—it was all *his* doing." He gripped the arms of the chair to rise. "Now I must catch my train."

"Sit down."

"But your promise!"

"I made no promise. You're catching no train."

Mr. Haley leaped to his feet. "You did!" he howled. He waved his arms wildly. "You've tricked me. I'll not say another word. I'll retract all!"

"Very well."

"Where—where are you going?"

"To the United States marshal's office. On a matter of murder." He stooped and picked up the photograph. "I believe you dropped this." He put it into his pocket.

"You can't!"

"You've repented nothing!" said Allen harshly. "You're only terrified of being a party to a murder. You're trying to save your hide—and that's all!"

"Wait!" Mr. Haley fumbled for the chair and sank into it. "State's evidence—there is state's evidence, I know. I've heard——"

"I'll do all I can for you."

Mr. Haley let his hands fall limply. "What do you want me to do?"

Allen dragged a straight chair and set it directly in front of Mr. Haley. He seated himself and leaned forward.

"Now," he said. "I'm not so much interested in the murder just now. Tell me this—is Foster about to pull stakes?"

"I—we think he may. He said at the outset he wanted only a year. He said he only wanted the cream. He's the most vicious man alive! It would please him to leave us holding the bag if he could——!"

"Calm yourself. Now—I want the whole story of you and Foster and your crowd. Start at the beginning."

Breathing heavily, Mr. Haley looked at the floor and said dully: "It began in Washington. Foster, Carver, Horner, Snodgrass, Cook, Tanner, Gottlieb, Everett, Tyndall——"

"Tony Tyndall?"

"Yes."

"But not his wife. His wife had nothing——"

"I wondered at first," said Haley.

"No!" said Allen. "She couldn't have! Tyndall himself told her nothing. You know it!"

"I don't think she could have known. For she is one of Foster's victims. All her money. He has taken it all from her. He—— *Don't lift your hand, sir!* I am an old man."

"You're not such an old man—but, did you get any of her money, old man?"

"No. I swear it. Carver—Tanner—Cook—they got a little. But Foster insisted she was something separate—his private affair. He didn't give me a cent of hers."

"God damn you," Allen whispered flatly.

"Sir, a man of the cloth——"

"Go on," said Allen wearily. "Just go on. From the beginning."

"Well . . . there was Washington. We met three times in Washington, in February and March of a year ago. At the first meeting . . ."

CHAPTER THIRTY

SAWYER heard the raised voices in the hall. She got up from the dining table and went out to them.

Falling Leaf was arguing with Dick Robinson. Standing behind him, head lowered, was the Reverend Mr. Haley.

"You can't come in till she say!" said Falling Leaf doggedly.

"It's all right, F.L.," said Sawyer.

Falling Leaf waddled out triumphantly.

"What is it, Dick?"

"Good day, Sawyer," said Dick cheerfully. "Happy Fourth of July to you."

"Very well. Why have you come here?"

"I wondered if Mr. Haley and I could go up to one of your bedrooms?"

"What's that?"

"We were up all night. Mr. Haley especially is tired."

He took Mr. Haley's arm and the big man obediently permitted himself to be escorted toward the stairs.

"Just a minute, Dick. Is this some sort of sport?"

"Not exactly—but in a way."

"You mayn't go up there."

"We're halfway up."

"Come down, if you please."

"Sawyer," said a voice.

Her eyes went to the back parlour entrance. Allen stood there. Smiling. She stiffened. "How did you get in here?" she demanded.

"Through the window. It seemed the surest way. Do you mind that I put Jigger in your stable?"

"I want you to go. I've told you I don't want to see you."

"Will you come back here?" He disappeared into the back parlour.

When she entered the room, he stood looking longingly at her for a moment, then attempted to take her in his arms. "Oh, stop that," she said, wrenching herself free. "What is it you want?"

He indicated the sofa for her to seat herself on, waited until she made up her mind to do so, then sat in a curved chair near her. As he did so, his jacket fell open and she saw a holstered pistol at his side.

"What is this all about?"

Again his eyes searched her face; she looked away with an expression of annoyance. "You're pale," he said. "You've lost weight."

"The heat . . . Please tell me what you want so you can go."

"Sawyer, the next thirty minutes may decide a great many things—affecting you, and me, and others. Its extremely delicate—it may not come off. Will you help me?"

"I don't see why you'd want any help from me. Or how anything you do in the next thirty minutes or the next thirty years could affect me."

"If I asked you to help?" he said earnestly.

"There's something you probably should know." She hesitated, then said flatly, "I'm going away."

His eyes widened with surprise, then narrowed. A long moment passed before he spoke. "With someone?" he asked reluctantly.

"Yes."

"Did he talk you into that, too?" asked Allen bitterly.

"I've not been talked into anything. I've made my own choice. It's my own affair—I'd rather not discuss it with you. But I thought you should know before going any further with—whatever brought you here."

He shook his head. "You're not going away with Barney Foster."

"Don't tell me what I'm going or not going to do," she flared. "I didn't say it was Barney Foster."

"Isn't it, though?"

"I won't talk about it with you. I only want you to leave my house."

Allen's mouth tightened; then he said angrily, "You do, do you? Well, it just happens that the reason I'm here is to make sure that neither you nor anybody else will ever be duped and deceived by Mr. Barney Foster again. He's going to be shown up for what he is."

"I see," said Sawyer coolly. "And you expect me to help with that?"

"Yes."

"That would be laudable of me, wouldn't it? To help 'show up' the man who considers me his friend—or, as you once so courteously said—more than friend?"

"Sawyer——!"

"Oh, I know you don't like him—you never did—and I know why. But even if he were as bad as you try to make him out—which I happen to know he isn't—I've made my choice and I'm perfectly satisfied with it."

"You mean you love him?"

"Is that any of your business?"

His colour drained and he got up so abruptly his chair skidded backward. "All right!" he said. "All right! I'm sorry I even asked for your help. Every happiness, Mrs. Tyndall!"

As he strode for the doorway, she longed to cry, "Wait!" but if he should stop and turn, what was there she could say?

He stopped of his own accord, and ran his fingers through his hair, and turned back to her. "Sawyer," he said desperately, "let me just re-

mind you of two incidents. First, the morning after your marriage to Tony you two were going down the hall of your hotel and you stopped at the door of a room occupied by several men. Barney Foster was one of them and he said something about wanting to kiss the bride. He came out and kissed you. Remember?"

"Yes, I remember that. But—you couldn't know! How could you have——"

"The second thing is this: one day last winter, on Saturday, February eighth, to be exact, you were summoned to the office of Slim Carver. There he, Cook, Judge Tanner, and Barney Foster——"

Her face turned white with fear. "No!"

"Yes——"

"Please . . . no . . ."

"Don't be frightened."

Her shoulders drooped. "You know," she said tonelessly. "You know what I did there."

"Yes."

"Am I—are you going to send me to prison?"

"No. Not you. I only mention it, and the other incident, to persuade you I know what I'm talking about. Roland Dince will be here soon with the whole story of everything written out—you can read it for yourself. And then if you don't believe it—well, I won't say anything more. But I do believe this, Sawyer: if I had known an hour ago about—you and Barney, I wouldn't have come here to—to bother you. I dread the shock and hurt you're in for. But it's too late, and too much depends on it for me to back out now for personal reasons. It's not much that we want you to do. You won't be betraying anybody." He sat beside her, entreatingly, but when his hand impulsively touched hers he at once withdrew it. "Listen!" he pleaded. "Very soon, we hope, a number of men you've always liked and trusted will be arriving at your door. Greet them as men you like—but also you must make it appear, this time, that you share a secret with them. Will you do that—let them in, and pretend to that extent, and don't do or say anything else until they're all assembled?"

"But—" she said bewildered. "I——"

There was an urgent knocking at the front door.

"They're falling for it!" said Allen. "Go let that one in." She stared at him. He stood and took her hands and lifted her to her feet firmly. "Do it, Sawyer!" he commanded, and then, with a cynical smile, "For whatever memories there are between us, anyway."

Dazed, she went out and down the hall to the door.

Jerry Horner stepped in quickly and closed the door behind himself.

"Did you know——?" he began.

"Yes," said Sawyer. "Will you come in here?"

His face florid, full-blown moustaches quivering with anxiety, Horner stood in the centre of the parlour, twisting his straw hat. He peered about the room.

"Where are the others? I thought——"

"They're—on the way. Won't you sit here?"

He perched on the edge of a side chair and whipped back his moustaches with two quick thrusts. Sawyer went to the sofa and seated herself.

"You don't look well, Mrs. Tyndall," said Horner. The odour of prescription drugs on him drifted to her. "You mustn't worry. I don't know how you fit into this—I thought on the other hand that you—but let's not lose our heads. We won't let him—Don't stare at me so!"

She averted her eyes.

Horner nervously drummed the crown of his hat. He was dressed in his best for the holiday.

Somewhere in the distance, Sawyer realised, a band was playing.

"Nice music," she said tentatively. "At the picnic on the school-grounds?"

"As long as it's playing, he hasn't started talking yet. That Foster! I knew that sooner or later he would pull a double-cross."

"What?"

"That confounded Dunbar! I told Carver—Where is Carver? Where's everybody?" He got to his feet. "Roland Dince got me up from the dinner table. He told me the others were already——"

Sawyer spoke hastily. "Out the window. Isn't that Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Gottleib coming up the walk?"

Horner strode out to the hall to meet them. Sawyer heard their excited voices. The three men came into the parlour, Gottleib a-sputter: "... and iff Foster spills effrything to dot crowd—our lifes von't be vurth a nagle! Ach, Frau Tyndall! Who vould haf thought——"

"We never know, do we?" said Sawyer, and wondered what she had meant by the question.

"To think!" exclaimed Gottleib. "I vus settin' on the pladform beside him—vaiting for da odders to arrif—ven Mr. Dince waggled his finger—so— from below and got me down and vispered it to me and said de odders were—— Ach, settin' beside him!"

"There's somebody!" said Horner. He crossed to a window and pulled back the white curtains. "Tanner in his runabout. He's overtaken Slim Carver and is picking him up."

Sawyer went to let them in. Tanner looked at her closely. Both men heard their colleagues' voices in the parlour and left her for them. A medley of questions and exclamations met them.

"He vill expose us!" cried Gottleib above the rest. "Vot to do!"

"For one thing," said Judge Tanner, vexed, "you can keep your mouth shut."

The imperious note silenced them. Judge Tanner twisted his lanky frame about to face Sawyer standing in the archway. Her hand crept unwillingly up to her locket.

"Mrs. Tyndall," he said warily, "you look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"Do—" her vocal cords stuck—"I?"

Tanner continued tautly without the affected pauses between phrases: "I should like to be told, Mrs. Tyndall, what misdeeds you and Mr. Foster have committed and for which he is expected to shift sole responsibility to you before that Fourth of July crowd? What is it you two have done that we don't seem to know about?"

"I'm not sure I should reveal that," said Sawyer, with more firmness than she had hoped for.

"Dot Dince told me——" began Gottleib.

"Yes!" twanged Ed Snodgrass excitedly. "He told me too. He said Foster and Sawyer Tyndall had pulled a couple of deals together which Dunbar had also found out, and that Foster was going to slap them together on *her* when he——"

"But what deals?" inquired Tanner. "Why were the rest of us kept in the dark?"

"It's that Foster!" said Horner. "You can't trust him—I never did!—he might have done anything with her and not——"

"Maybe," said Tanner. He surveyed them coolly. "In the emergency of the moment, I admit it appeared not improbable that Mrs. Tyndall had something in common with us which warranted our coming—But now that I find most of us suddenly in Mrs. Tyndall's house, I'm beginning to wonder why Dince was so generous with the information he gave each of us with such furtive haste."

"One of Mr. Dince's most engaging faculties——" said someone.

The men in the room turned together to the portieres separating front and back parlours.

"—is his ability," continued Allen, to——"

"A trap, by God!" bellowed Horner.

"It vusn't us done anything," whined Gottleib. "It vus Foster! He made us do it! I just vunted to be a bissness man——"

"Shut up, you goddam heinie!" shouted Tanner.

"At least," said Allen, "we might as well be quiet about it." He shot an appreciative glance to Sawyer. "Well done, Mrs. Tyndall."

Tanner's eyes snapped. He put his hands to his coat lapels. "I serve notice, Mr. Dunbar, I'm leaving this house at once."

"You'll forgive me if I disagree."

"I resent your wearing a firearm in my presence."

"Sorry," said Allen. "I didn't think it showed. It makes me feel a little foolish myself."

"The scheme you used to trick these gentlemen into coming to this house, sir, was shoddy and asinine."

"I'll confess I'm a novice at this sort of thing, and probably not very clever. I can only justify myself by pointing out that it worked. You mustn't give me all the credit, however. Editor Robinson thought of some of the best features of it, and, as I was about to say, an engaging faculty of Mr. Dince is his ability to make whatever he happens to say seem entirely plausible—for a time, anyway. I don't think of anybody besides Mr. Dince would could have caused a group of full-grown men to leap about with such alacrity as you men have—granting, of course, that you had very bad consciences, and that your growing distrust of Foster and fear that he is about to desert you made you susceptible to a belief that Foster indeed planned to do the thing Mr. Dince confidentially disclosed to each of you."

"Well, does he?" twanged Ed Snodgrass.

"Does he what, Mr. Councilman?"

"Has Mayor Foster learned that you've found out—well, found out!—and *does* he plan to save his own skin by telling that crowd at the school grounds that *he* is the one who has learned that *we've* been doing—well, whatever—and that he is horrified and outraged that such things have been going on, and that *he*——"

"Mr. Snodgrass," said Allen, "Mr. Robinson was convinced that you would believe that story—long enough, anyway—but I must confess that your continuing credulity is beyond belief."

Sawyer could not take her eyes from Allen. She thought she had never seen him so jovially at ease. He seemed to be enjoying himself hugely, except that his lips were a little paler than usual, and there was a certain keyed-up tenseness in his manner she knew to be not quite natural. The way his whitened fingers gripped his wide belt in front, for instance.

There was a knock at the door.

"Mrs. Tyndall?" asked Allen.

At the door she found Frank Everett, the councilman-restaurant owner. He greeted her with the ducking little bow he always had welcomed her with when she swept in with a party of friends for a private dinner. She brought him into the parlour.

"Don't say a damned word!" admonished Judge Tanner.

Everett's consternation made him incapable of a word.

"Now," said Allen, "I believe we're all present or accounted for. Will you have seats, gentlemen?"

"No!" said Judge Tanner.

"Then you may remain standing, sir. I suspect, however, that Mr. Gottleib and possibly one or two others will welcome a suggestion to sit."

Gottleib collapsed into a chair and several others followed suit.

"Very well," said Judge Tanner, "if you have sufficiently relished your childish cat-and-the-mouse game, perhaps you will now tell us why you have assembled us through this highly illegal deception."

"Well . . . there are several reasons, Judge," said Allen. "My own is largely personal—I'll give it first. Of all the reprehensible acts of this pack of knaves, it strikes me that the basest was your swindling of an unsuspecting girl of her fortune and, what is even viler, instigating reports which destroyed her position in the community and capping it by gagging her so she had no chance to deny the truth of your calumny."

"Mr. Dunbar," said Judge Tanner, "I have always heard the Harvard Law School spoken of with esteem. Either its repute is false or else you surely were its most backward student. It appears you never were informed of the laws of slander—which, I assure you, I have every intention of bringing to bear against you."

"I think maybe we're both getting a little high-flown, Judge," grinned Allen. "Under different circumstances, I'd tell you in simple language what you could do with that slur on my alma mater."

"Was it for the idle pleasure of delivering yourself of these slanders that you made us prisoners here?"

"I was about to tell you *my* one reason: it seemed to me rather fitting that your most defenceless victim should have the satisfaction of seeing you squirm as you come to terms. Excepting that, I should have as soon thrown you into the jug without fuss or ado."

"Jail?" screamed Gottleib. "Not jail! It vus dot Foster——"

"As it turns out," said Allen sarcastically, "*my* reason has fallen rather flat. Mrs. Tyndall, you see, prefers you as friends in spite of all."

Sawyer gave him an angry glance. There was no need to keep calling her "Mrs. Tyndall" so cruelly. And what did he mean by so absurdly speaking of her having been swindled of her fortune? Why, she had money—quantities of it. What irked her most was the way everybody here, not only Allen but Barney Foster's own friends, suddenly seemed eager to turn against him and to blame him for—what? If only there was not such a crossfire of meaningless shouting . . . !

"However," continued Allen, "Mr. Robinson also had a reason for wanting it this way, and since he has been vigilant in trying to run you down for the community's sake, I thought him entitled to consideration. I suspect that it's partly because, being a newspaperman, he knows how to exploit a good story when he has one, but I accepted his argument that since most of your crimes were against the people of this town, the

people were entitled to have you stand up before them where they can see you as you confess to those crimes——"

The front door was heard to open—quick, jerky footsteps—and Roland Dince stood, blowing, in the archway. He carried a bundle of typewritten sheets under an arm.

"Sorry!" he panted. "Robinson's stenographer made a mistake on the last page and had to do the last ones over."

None of the councilmen heeded him. They were still thunderstruck by Allen Dunbar's last sentence.

"Will you pass them out, Dince? A copy to Mrs. Tyndall, if you will."

Sawyer took her copy to the piano stool, about the only vacant seat. The pages were clipped together, but she had begun to tremble so, she thought she could not hold them. Allen came beside her, and, a reassuring hand on her shoulder, leaned over to glance at the typewriting. She pulled her shoulder away, and he moved to the other side of the room.

There was a moment of silence as the councilmen reluctantly accepted Dince's proffers.

Judge Tanner, having a document in his hands, took a magisterial stance. He did not trouble to go through his customary routine with unneeded spectacles. He was the first to comment. "This fairy tale begins amusingly enough—since it happens I was never in Washington in my life."

"Indeed," said Allen.

Gottlieb's frantic eyes had darted down the page in search of his own name. "It iss a lie!" he cried. "Nobody knows I burned my Reading store for insurance. It iss a dirty lie!"

"It's a small item," said Allen. "You were only a beginner then. Read on."

There were several minutes of almost complete silence, broken only by occasional gasps, exhalations, and mutterings. Through the open windows drifted the sounds of a stirring march, "Down the Street."

"This is an utter falsehood," declared Frank Everett. "I never in my life attended a meeting in Foster's office where a ten-thousand-dollar bribe was paid to award a storm-sewer contract to the Y-X Construction Company."

"Didn't you?" murmured Allen sympathetically.

"This whole thing is such a garbled mass of invention it's impossible to make head or tail of it," complained Judge Tanner.

"Wait till you get to the murder," said Allen. "It reads simpler."

"Murder!"

Six heads lifted abruptly to focus their frightened eyes on his.

"Whose murder?" said Snodgrass.

"Trevaine's. Cecilia Trevaine."

"We had nothing to do with that!" said Carver. "None of us were present. You can't pin that on us."

"Gentlemen, it may be true, as Judge Tanner indicated, that my law education was spotty. But I think the judge himself will tell you that when a conspiracy has been demonstrated, the law is that the act of any of the conspirators, even though performed without the knowledge or consent of the fellow conspirators, will be considered the joint act of all, if it furthers the purpose of the conspiracy."

Five heads turned entreatingly to Judge Tanner. He concerned himself with the document.

"Who signed this rigmarole anyway?" he asked testily. He flipped to the last page. Then he was silent. The others followed his lead, saw, and were silent.

"Of course," said Allen, "that's only the typewritten signature. The original——"

"You have no original!" said Tanner. "I challenge you to produce Haley to verify this mass of lies!"

"Dince——" said Allen.

Dince left the room.

"I vill nefer get up before dose people and admit to dis!" cried Gottleib. "I would be lynched!"

"Well, that's up to you, of course," said Allen. "Nobody can force you to testify against yourself. All of you might want to consider the advantages, though. *Somebody's* going to get up before that crowd before another thirty minutes has passed, and if it has to be me—well, naturally, I won't be interested in detailing any justification you may have for your conduct. Those words you're reading will be good enough for me to read to them. Of course, if Mr. Robinson and I stood beside you to protect you while you followed with your own version of it, all your defences and your reasons for having done this or that——"

"Don't fall for that," warned Tanner.

"Well," said Allen, "you know perfectly well that each one of you is itching for the chance to load the blame off on the rest of you. At least, you'll have the opportunity of getting in your version against the other fellow's at the same time—so it will have equal weight at any rate. But of course, the choice is yours to make."

"It vus Forster! I didn't vunt to be a criminal! I've got a nice store. I like dis town! I vunt to stay here! I'm prospering! I don't vunt to be mixed up in no more crookedness! I was intimidated!"

"You might want to tell them that," said Allen.

"I wasn't in on practically any of it," protested Snodgrass, "I've got a wife and thirteen children."

"You might wish to point that out."

"Shut up, you two welshers!" bellowed Horner. He leaped to his feet, shaking his papers at them. "Who was it argued the power-plant bid could be upped ten per cent. more—greedy fat little rats—both of you—and I'll tell 'em so. My drugstore—"

Sawyer had heard less and less of the conversation beating back and forth. She read hurriedly through the first pages . . . Barney Foster . . . much of it making little sense to her . . . Barney Foster . . . here and there a paragraph striking her comprehension forcibly . . . Barney. And then, she reached the section which dealt at length, but fantastically, weirdly, strangely and unbelievably, on her relationship with Barney. And as the unknown reverse picture formed—drawn of incredible impositions on her trust and friendship—the room jellied and lunged, the words spoken around her merged and became altogether meaningless. At length, reaching the end of it, she let the papers slip from her strengthless fingers and sat staring. No, Barney, she thought dully; no . . .

She got to her feet . . . she started from the room. Allen, leaning over Everett—that kindly, hospitable restaurant man—pointing out something on Everett's paper, straightened and stood in her path.

"Well?" he said—triumphantly? she wondered.

Her eyes would not lift higher than his tie clasp. "I don't believe it," she said listlessly. "It's all a lie."

"You still—?"

"Let me pass, please."

He stood to one side, and she went out and started up the stairs.

As she ascended, she was passed by Robinson and Dince accompanying the Reverend Mr. Haley down the stairs.

She stopped, gripping the rail. A swift picture of Mr. Haley puffing up a stairway—a hotel stairway—this same pink-cheeked man—Tony: "Mornin', Rev"—Haley turning into a smoke-filled room—the men inside, those same men now downstairs?—Barney coming out of the room: "I want to kiss the bride."

And with that scrap of recollection of Mr. Haley puffing past Tony into Foster's room a thousand recollections rose and fused instantaneously to form a dread recognition. Desperately, she clung to the rail to keep from falling.

Clutters of images tangling now, but most clear, vivid as fire, stood one picture in her mind. It had nothing to do with money, land, or the public shame he had put upon her. It was: going up these same stairs with him, his great arm around her, her head against him, expectant of imminent, yearning surrender to him . . . her most trusted friend.

She pushed aside shoes in her bedroom closet until she reached the blacksnake whip coiled in a far corner. Barney Foster: "There never was a scoundrel who could stand up to a woman with a whip in her

hand." The sentence had lashed her numb mind a moment before, on the stairs; it had acted like a catch releasing a tight, governed spring; it was then she had begun to move.

From the moment her hand closed on the whip, until, sometime later, some third of a mile away, she heard herself crying, "You fools!" she had no afterward recollection of the intervening time or movement—except vaguely, fragmentarily, like the fractional recalling of a nightmare on awakening.

She went down the stairs, holding the whip by its short handle, the twelve-foot length of lash snaking down the steps behind her. There was a jumbled uproar in the parlour: imprecations directed against the Reverend Mr. Haley. She did not pause. She went out the front door to the street, turned south, reached the brick walk of Plum Street, and continued along it at a deliberate pace. There was no expression on her face—the eyes glazed, lips slightly parted, like a somnambulist's.

In the distance the band played. It stopped. There was applause, a silence, then renewed handclapping. At the end of the third block, the school grounds came into view. Several thousand people were thronged around a patriotically decorated platform standing in the centre of the block-sized playground. At the front of the platform stood a solidly built man, his black-and-silver hair shining in the sun. His arms lifted in easy gestures, the crisp tones of his speech rang out in "great republic," "our Anglo-Saxon heritage," "day of Independence," "Jefferson, Washington, Hamilton . . ." An outburst of handclapping . . .

As she crossed the grounds, gliding around the littered and deserted picnic tables, the speaker faltered. The direction of his eyes caused heads to turn. Only those on the near outskirts could see her. They stared at the slender, familiar figure, arms motionless at her sides, the long black lash writhing over the ground at her heels.

She walked into the crowd, and the first ranks made a way for her, murmuring, and those farther in, hearing the murmurs, turned and saw and drew back for her to pass. The speaker looked away, and he talked on, but a hollowness had replaced his resonance and the majority of people who had not yet seen sensed something amiss and a whispered question rustled through the crowd.

She reached the bottom step of the platform and walked up without slowing. He fell silent.

She stood some ten feet from him. Facing her then, he said, "Sawyer—"

She drew back her arm and lifted it and the lash rose lazily into the air and the leaf-shaped snapper on the end soared. She did not have the strength to throw the long whip with force, and the lash fell lightly across his shoulders. As she drew back her arm, the lash snaked from

him and across the floor and rose again in the lazy arc. He stepped aside, and the lash slapped the floor.

"Sawyer——" he said again.

She took three deliberate steps forward and he retreated. She lifted her arm again.

"She's horsewhipping him, by God!" roared a voice.

The third time the lash was thrown with so little strength that it collapsed in mid-air. But as she advanced once more, he turned to the edge of the platform and jumped down and pushed his way into the crowd.

Alone on the platform, she blinked and shook her head, as if trying to awaken. The whip dropped from her hand. Upturned faces stretching endlessly . . . where had she stood above this white-water sea of faces before? Or was this the same time . . . and all between——

"Good girl, Sawyer!"

Was that Kit Pendleton's voice? So far away.

The rising clamour: "What's going on?" "Why did you do it?" "Tell us about it."

She opened her mouth to speak and the crowd fell silent.

"I have nothing to tell you," she said mechanically. "You were clapping for him. You fools. You're as much the fool, all of you, as I was. No," she said, "this is your town and it should have been a good town, but there was he, and his kind, and there was I, the fool. I could have been one of you, but I did not become one of you." She laughed. "You called me your queen, the queen of the Kiowa-Comanche country. I remember that, because I stood on a platform like this and you were down there, like you are now, and you shouted for me. And I betrayed you, and that man ruled you and robbed you and committed murder among you, and I——"

There was someone at her side. "Sawyer," the voice implored. Pen Pendleton? "Get control of yourself. Do you know what you've done? I think I know why. But tell us. We're for you."

Her shoulders sagged. "You're for me one day, you're against me the next, and now you're ready to be for me again. And you never know why, and neither do I."

"Sawyer—this is Pen!"

"Look-a-yonder!" A shout, and all who could see looked.

A group of men walking, followed by a man on horseback, was entering the school grounds and approaching the platform. The nearest spectators fell back to make way. "Why, it's the councilmen and the Judge and Preacher Haley—everybody the mayor said he wondered where they was at when he began his speech." "Holy cow, and they're being herded

by the city attorney and the newspaper publisher and that funny camera man." "Holy cow, the city attorney's riding herd on 'em."

Roland Dince and Dick Robinson came up on the platform first, and stood to one side as the other men filed up. Allen reined his pony beside the platform and stepped from stirrup to flooring.

"Allen," whispered Pen Pendleton, "what in hell are you pulling off?"

"You'll soon see," said Allen, his questioning eyes on Sawyer revealing his surprise to see her there. "Sorry there wasn't time to let you in on it, Pen."

Allen stepped to the front of the platform. "Folks, we've brought you some Fourth of July speakers. They'll be a little different from what you expected, but pretty good for the Fourth of July at that. Everybody knows Mr. Dince. He's going to read a statement to you, and then those unhappy-looking gentlemen back there are going to step up and give their side of it. I just want to ask one thing of you. I think you may be pretty angry before this performance is half over. Control yourselves. Wait to hear it all. And then, let's keep in mind we live under the law. There's ample provision in the law for carrying out whatever action you think fitting. All right, Mr. Dince."

Dince stepped forward, adjusted his steel spectacles, rattled his papers, cleared his throat.

"Just a minute, Mr. Dince," said Allen. "Where," he asked, "is the mayor?"

"Ask Sawyer Tyndall!" yelled someone near the platform.

"He squirmed past me back here," cried another voice.

"I seen him headin' like a bat outa Hades for the downtown district," shouted someone at the outskirts of the crowd.

Allen swung around and walked close to Sawyer. "So," he said in a low furious voice, "you had to come and warn him, you——"

Sawyer stared glassily into his wrathful face. "I hate you," she muttered, knowing it was herself she hated to the depth of her despairing soul.

Contemptuously, Allen turned from her. "Take charge here, Dick," he said crisply. "Help out Dince if he needs it."

Stepping into the saddle, he asked for room to get out. Once he had left the crowd behind, he set out for Main Street.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

EXCEPT for a desk clerk cleaning his nails with a pen point, the lobby of the Apache Hotel was lifeless when Allen entered. He crossed toward the stairs, asking, without breaking his stride, "Did Mayor Foster come in the last few minutes?"

"Yes," said the clerk, blowing on his nails.

"What's his number?" asked Allen at the first step.

"Two fifteen."

Allen reached the head of the stairs and went down the hall. The door of 215 was ajar. He took a deep breath and went in. The room spick-and-span and empty. On the bed, though, a spilled box of revolver cartridges. A space in the middle of the bunch, as if a handful had been scooped up. Allen went to the closet and threw open the door and stepped back. Only a few suits and an opera cape hung neatly.

Downstairs, he said to the clerk, "Foster's not in his room."

"I know it. He went out after he came in."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"You didn't ask me."

"You bastard!"

The clerk stared open-mouthed after him. "Why? What's up?"

As he galloped down the practically deserted Main Street, holding on his straw hat, a part of Allen's mind wondered where would be the most likely place for Foster to go, and another part wondered why he had cursed the clerk so unreasonably. He excused the latter as an explosion of relief after the fear which had seized him as he threw open the closet door.

He veered the pony around the bandstand, where a few workmen were tacking bunting, and avoided other workmen sprinkling talcum on the roped-off pavement in preparation for the evening's dance. As he passed the shining new trolley, he glanced inside and saw the motorman asleep on one of the seats.

From the direction of the distant school grounds an angry roar of many voices made its way to him against the south wind. Dince must have reached a particularly telling revelation . . .

He rode around the sandstone depot. The train had pulled out—there was a smudge of smoke on the northern horizon. He leaned from the saddle and spoke to the agent behind the ticket window.

"Did Mayor Foster take that train, Mr. Booker?"

"Nope," said the agent. "He just missed it. Ran after it and couldn't quite make it."

"Where did he go?"

"Across to Harry's Livery Stable and got a horse and lit out."

"After the train?"

"He'll have to go some to catch it."

"Mr. Booker, will you please wire the sheriff at El Reno to board the train and arrest Foster on my orders if he's on it?"

"Arrest the mayor!"

But Allen, already going up the track at a full run, did not hear the agent's exclamation.

After two miles of running in the sun, Jigger had lathered and was heaving. Allen reined to a walk. They entered a cut: the red clay banks hurled heat from both sides. Allen took off his coat, rolled it neatly and lashed it behind the saddle. His wet shirt cooled him momentarily. He loosened his tie and undid his stiff collar.

By the time they came out of the cut and were going along atop a fill, Jigger seemed to have regained his wind. Allen put him into a run again.

At a point where the rails made a sweeping curve eastward, Allen left the track and cut across a field of cotton, guiding the pony between the rows to avoid trampling the plants. Coming to an unfenced pasture, he crossed it at a run, and reached the track again where it turned north.

Far up the twin glistening rails, riding at a walk, was a man on horseback.

Jigger was blowing hard once more. Allen pulled down to a walk. He took off his hat and fanned himself.

Now that he had Foster in sight, Allen wondered what he should do. He thought of the spilled cartridges on the bed, and there was a heaviness in his stomach. He nudged the pony to a trot. How close could he get to Foster before Foster became aware of him? If he could draw near enough, the element of surprise might be enough to cause Foster to give up docilely.

He was still half-a-mile behind when, for some reason, perhaps out of fear that he might be followed, Foster turned in the saddle. Immediately, he spurred his horse to top speed.

Oh hell, thought Allen, kicking Jigger with his heels.

After a mile of racing, Allen had not gained on Foster. If anything, he had lost a little. He didn't know how much endurance Foster's mount had; he knew that Jigger, though a reasonably good horse, could not be expected to run very far in this heat without respite. He pushed the pony until its labouring was painful, then reined to a walk. Foster had glanced back from time to time. Now, seeing Allen break off, he brought his horse down to a trot, and finally, to a walk.

How much better it would have been, thought Allen, if Foster had

overtaken the train. The sheriff could have arrested him and turned him over to Territorial authorities in the regular way. He was resolved that Foster should be sent to the penitentiary if it was the last resolution he should ever make, but he had no desire for a physical showdown outside the law. Assuming he eventually overtook Foster, this encounter wasn't going to be light. Foster had a pistol. He had a pistol. He had no eagerness to be a one-man force of vengeance; he hadn't counted on a hell-for-leather chase after the villain. The locale was right for such a ride, perhaps, but there was something about the aspect of a young lawyer in a straw sailor in cross-country pursuit of a middle-aged New York politician, South-western though the terrain might be, which struck Allen as being so incongruous as to make them both a little ridiculous.

He knew that he was avoiding the real source of his detestation of this situation: he, the rejected lover, trying to run down the man preferred to him. She had refused to believe—or care about—Foster's conduct, and had slipped out to warn her deceiver. How could she have? In what inexplicable way did the mind of a woman in love justify itself? For a moment, he hopefully told himself there must be error in his estimate, but he had no patience with wishful thinking, he agonisingly recalled her muttered, "I hate you," and he was accustomed to the authority of evidence seen and heard.

Oh damn her, he said to himself; damn Foster for being the better man, and damn myself for being so cheap as to try to show him up before her . . . Why not, he asked himself, rein up now, and let him go? Later, he can get in touch with her, she can join him in some city, and then let them love, or go to hell, as they please.

His hand tightened on the rein, but he did not pull up. There was an element in him, just now drawn taut as a piano wire but in no danger of breaking, which told him that there were considerations beyond the personal relationship of Foster, Sawyer, and himself. He was an official, and as much as he might loathe the assignment, he had no choice except to continue this pursuit, for his community. It did not matter even that he most hated the pursued not for legal wrongdoing but for winning what he had himself wanted more than life . . .

Foster reached a grade crossing. He deserted the right of way and turned west on the dirt road.

The sudden change of direction suggested deception and Allen kicked Jigger to a gallop. Foster forced his horse likewise. Allen could not cut across, for on his left was a field of corn fenced with barbed wire. He had to wait until he reached the crossing before he could turn into the road.

They didn't run more than two thousand yards. Jigger kept trying to

slow down and Allen didn't have the heart to push him. Sooner or later, Allen knew, he would have to push one of these sprints to a conclusion, and either he would overtake Foster in that final drive or he would fail. But there was plenty of time. It was only about four. There were almost five hours of daylight left.

He wondered: had Foster worked out some kind of plan for eluding him? Allen couldn't see his point in heading west. Most of all, he dreaded that Foster might elect to wheel and charge him for a sudden decision . . .

He saw Foster dismount at Gate No. 5 in the east fence of the Indian pasture to open the gate which barred the road. If only a few hundred yards had separated them, he might, by going at full speed, have been on Foster before he could get through. But Allen was more than half-a-mile behind. After entering the pasture, Foster ran his horse a few hundred yards, apparently to make sure he had lost no ground. Allen let him increase the distance.

It occurred to Allen that if he pressed Foster now he might make it difficult for him to get down and open the gate on the west side of the pasture before Allen would be on him. However, Foster might simply choose to turn north and stay in the pasture indefinitely. So, instead, Allen stopped at a pond and let Jigger wade in and drink moderately among a dozen head of Indians' steers which were cooling themselves in the tepid water. When he reined out, Foster was no longer in sight.

Allen trotted to the top of a rise. Foster had left the pasture and was continuing leisurely along the section line road.

At the first intersection he turned north. Again, the fenced, cultivated fields prevented Allen from cutting across.

Going north, they passed several farmhouses, but at none of them did anybody seem to be at home. Most farm families had gone into town for the Independence Day celebration. However, farther on, they passed a crew threshing wheat in a distant field, the steam engine throwing a black column of smoke into the sky, the thresher spewing straw, the wagons loaded with bundles converging on it. It was necessary to keep the few threshing machines available running unceasingly to get in the bumper crop. Allen thought momentarily of riding over and soliciting the aid of the crew.

He dismissed the idea. It would be folly to expect men riding draft horses bareback to overtake Foster, even assuming they could unhitch and set out before Foster should be out of sight.

A second, and more compelling reason for dismissing the idea was that the continuing pursuit had begun to arouse in Allen a desire to bring this thing to a conclusion alone. The certainty that there must eventually be a moment of showdown between Foster and himself he by now more

than accepted; unconsciously, an instinct of hunter after hunted had been plucked. Foster was his man. He would get him if he had to follow him to hell. He did not think in such terms as that. He thought it in no words at all. He simply began to find a satisfaction in this relentless pressing of Foster.

Still he had no desire to hurry, but no longer did he hold back because of indecision and embarrassment. Foster, he was sure, was a very worried man; it was not unpleasant to think of the cunning manipulator up ahead in the toils of desperation. And Foster, he was convinced now, would not voluntarily turn and face it out. With the thought, contempt touched Allen's lips . . .

A half-hour later Allen saw three sunbonneted women chopping cotton in a roadside field. He reined over to the fence.

"Good day, ladies," he said, tipping his straw hat. "My name is Allen Dunbar. Will any of your family be going to town to-day?"

"Menfolks is done there," said the eldest of the women. "Why?"

"I had hoped that someone might report to—the newspaper editor—Dick Robinson—that I passed by here."

"Why?"

Allen hesitated. He did not want to sound dramatic. "It is just possible I might be delayed in returning, and I should like to have it known I was seen going toward the mountains."

The woman looked at him narrowly. She peered up the road where Foster jogged.

"Ain't that your mayor went by here?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What you two doin'?"

"I hope to arrest him."

The woman turned her back and resumed her hoeing, as did the two younger women.

"We don't want no part of no trouble," she said.

"I understand. But if you'll only tell Mr. Robinson——"

"We may not be goin' for two or three days."

"At that time, then, or if one of your neighbours should go sooner."

"All right."

"Thank you." He rode on.

The mountains had lost their purple haze for Allen as he drew nearer to them; they had begun to show the gray of the granite and the green of the forests. Foster's intention had become clear. He had small chance of losing Allen in the comparatively level farm country; he might succeed in the wooded, rocky hills.

Allen strained his eyes in an effort to identify Foster's mount. It was sorrel, and heavier than Jigger, but, though he was fairly familiar with

the horses in Harry's Livery Stable, he couldn't decide which this one was. Harry had some very fine saddle horses that could outrun and outlast Jigger. He also had half-a-dozen nags. In his hurry, Foster might have got one of the nags. But it was more likely that Harry had provided the mayor with as good as he had.

In any event, the time had come for a horse race.

Allen patted Jigger on the neck, and spoke to him, then hit him with his heels and as Jigger responded he leaned forward in the saddle to cut down resistance. This time he forgot to hold to his hat and it sailed away. As the yards sped under him and Foster did not look around, Allen's hope rose that Foster might wait till too late. Foster was not unwary, though, and had not quit his habit of a frequent backward glance. Now, his elbows were spread suddenly as he kicked the horse and stood in the saddle. Exhilarated by the fast riding, Allen laughed at the way Foster's coat-tails flew out. Then Foster was hidden by the dust he raised. They kept it up for four miles.

Allen could not see that the distance between them had diminished by a yard. Jigger was covered with soapsudsy lather and chunks of it flying off were smearing Allen's clothing. The pony was gasping. When Jigger began to stumble, Allen gave it up. He eased Jigger, stopped, and got down. He patted the horse appreciatively and rubbed it down as best he could with the palms of his hand. He was dripping with sweat himself; and he felt red and prickly. There was, he discovered, no longer a south wind. The air had become static and still.

After a while, Allen remounted and plodded on. Foster had disappeared into the abruptly rising hills.

Now that the fenced and surveyed countryside had been left behind, Allen was sure Foster would turn off. He picked up the fresh hoofprints of Foster's horse in the road and divided his attention between them and the copses and piles of boulders on the hillsides. He had guessed correctly: the hoofprints turned off to the right and headed through a gravelly gully between two rocky, breastlike mounds.

Allen passed through the gully but on the other side he saw no trail in the rocky soil. There probably was evidence which an Indian could have detected, but Allen was no Indian. He could only take what seemed to be the most likely direction. He regretted bitterly that he had made the premature effort to outrun Foster, and so lost sight of him; still, what better choice had he had?

There was a zinging and a smack; a bullet struck a boulder beside his head and dropped flattened into his lap. He impulsively picked it up in his fingers, it burnt him and he dropped it, and it struck the pony's hide and the pony jumped. Allen looked and glimpsed Foster going over a crest to his left.

He said with a kind of awed astonishment, "Why, you son-of-a-bitch."

He rode up to the crest and looked down the slope into a tangle of undergrowth and soft maple. He backed Jigger from the crest, and there, for a few minutes, he thought the thoughts of a man who has been shot at, and weighed the life and living that could be his and the pain and death that might wait ahead.

He nudged Jigger and rode over the crest and down into the trees and thickets below. He could find no sign of Foster anywhere.

The canyons became shadowed and the sunlight lifted on the west slopes of the hills, and still Allen had been able to find no further trace. He rode back and forth, up hill and down, peering on all sides, feeling always that his back was a target which invited, and there rose in him a sense of inadequacy, stupidity, and failure.

Then he saw a wisp of grey smoke at the mouth of a canyon.

As he approached he recognised the canyon as a cove with precipitous sides which he and Pen Pendleton had once entered in search of wild turkey. Not far inside the mouth, the underbrush was afire from wall to wall.

So Foster was in there. Allen concluded he had set the fire to block the opening while he rode out the other end to freedom. Foster did not know: this was a cul-de-sac.

He put Jigger up to the blazing brush to see if the pony would go through. But the fire, working both ways, was deep; Jigger pawed and snorted and would not face into it.

Allen rode back for a distance, turned, and studied the typography. He searched his memory to try and decide which of the three walls would look easiest to climb to a man trapped at the foot of them. He decided it would most likely be the one on his left.

Working Jigger over to the left hill, he gave the pony free rein to thread the difficult ascent between the great granite boulders. At the top he dismounted some fifty feet from the edge of the cove and went over and lay on his stomach and looked over the rim.

Below, a horse screamed. Allen winced.

The cove had become a chimney up which clouds of smoke billowed; through the smoke he glimpsed flames which indicated that the entire growth on the cove floor was ablaze.

A breeze swirled a rift in the smoke. He saw Foster briefly, climbing the wall almost directly under him. Allen slid back and got to his feet and walked to a boulder. As he did so, he noticed that the sun, which would not set for an hour, had disappeared behind a bank of black clouds that had gathered in the north-west.

Foster scrambled over the rim. He stood up and blew. His clothing was mussed and he had lost or discarded his hat. He stood uncertain

for a moment—then he saw Allen's horse. Dropping to a partial crouch, drawing a revolver, his eyes cut in fright from rock to rock as he scurried crabwise in search of a protecting boulder.

Allen took his revolver from the holster and stepped out and waited for Foster to see him.

Foster's head jerked to the right to look directly at Allen. They were sixty feet apart. Foster seemed ashamed to have been caught in the undignified crouch. He straightened and stood erect, but he was careful to keep his pistol motionless, pointed ahead of himself and at a left angle to Allen.

Allen wondered what the man would say.

"Well, we've had quite a time of it."

Surprisingly, Foster's tone was pleasant.

"Yes," said Allen, "we have."

"You're a pretty good shot, I've heard."

"Pretty good."

"If I tried to swing around you'd probably have time to get in the first shot, wouldn't you?"

"Probably."

"You'd have only half a second advantage."

Allen said nothing. Inwardly, he pleaded: "Don't do it. I don't want to kill you. I don't want to be killed."

Foster also stood silent, as if struggling for the courage to chance it. He asked an unexpected question: "Who peached?"

"Reverend Haley."

"Haley? I figured Gottleib. But it was Haley." He made a sound with his lips. "Well . . . do you want me to come to you or you to me?"

"You may come to me. And you may drop your weapon."

Foster lowered his right arm, at the same time released his grip on the butt of the pistol, so that it turned over and hung upside down with his forefinger hooked in the trigger guard. Confession of defeat. Smiling, he walked toward Allen.

In Allen's mind a question of one word: "Where?"

A vision swimming up: the Luzon clearing, Hank standing with a carbine off guard, the Insurrecto sauntering up grinning, bolo in a hand relaxed at his side. Pretending to surrender, knowing he would never surrender . . .

Allen drew a deep, frightened breath in three choked stages, like a whimpering child; he sucked a corner of his lower lip between his teeth and clenched it to hold the breath in. Then he lowered his revolver to his side in an easy arc.

Foster's pistol spun over, the butt socking into the waiting palm as his arm came up.

Allen fired three times. The impact of each slug drove Foster back another step. At the third shot, the dead body collapsed backward. Allen ran forward to save it, but it slid over the rim and fell into the fire below.

At the foot of the hill Allen dismounted and vomited. He got to his feet and wiped his mouth and threw the handkerchief away.

The fire had burned a way out of the cove. Leaving behind dying grass sparks to twinkle in the purpling dusk, it had worked left of the nearest hill and out of sight.

Rather than send his pony through the hot ashes, Allen guided him round the right side of the hill. The pony insisted on turning into a ravine. Allen let him have his way. The pony's objective had been the pool of a spring he had smelled. Allen rinsed out his mouth and drank. While the pony sucked thirstily, Allen washed his face and patted water on his swollen lip. He remounted and they rode on refreshed.

Reaching the far side of the hill, Allen saw that the fire had crept almost a mile to the south-east. Riding alongside its wake, he overtook and passed its feeble front. Struggling for survival in the sparse grass of the rocky soil, it seemed unlikely the flickering flames would last much longer.

After they had reached the No. 19 north gate and entered the thick, sere grass of the pasture, Allen put the pony into an easy trot. Jigger found his way easily by the starlight.

Ordinarily, he would have enjoyed a starlit ride such as this . . .

Topping a rise of the pasture, he saw a speckle of silvery pin-points lying far ahead. He guessed what they were: the town's new street lights. It was after nine—the street dance must have begun. Had the unmasking of the gang dampened the celebration? It had probably enlivened it. He wouldn't go downtown. All he wanted now was to go home and fall in bed and sleep, if he could stop thinking about Foster's entreating eyes as he stumbled backward. Why had he fired three times? Once, surely, would have been enough to forestall Foster from opening fire. Where had the first bullet struck him? If he had stopped there he might not have pounding in his brain now the sickening knowledge of having killed. The picture-scrap of Foster's gun spinning up fast broke a fine sweat on Allen's forehead. He had been afraid—terrified—of dying in that instant. He knew that was why he had kept firing until Foster collapsed.

Was that the only reason he had kept firing? His imagination called up, as it had done more than once in recent months, an image of Sawyer and Foster embracing. He shook his head to clear it of the hated picture and the terror it aroused. You did not keep firing because of that, he stubbornly told himself; you killed only in self-defence; you know that,

you've got to stick to that. But he was not sure he could ever believe it wholly . . .

Riding through the still night, his forward movement had given him the effect of a wind on his face. Now a breeze caressed his back. The threatening norther must be coming on. He looked over his shoulder to see if clouds had blotted out the stars back there——

He wheeled the pony and drew up.

The flickering fire had made it to the pasture. A streak of yellow lay wide at the foot of the black mountain masses. Five miles behind him, it was silent and without menace. Too bad to have the grass burnt off, though; the Indians would have to find other pasturage for a few months. Couldn't he have knocked the fire out when it was at its low ebb? Very likely; he could have beaten it out with his coat, going from hummock to hummock. It would have been work, though, and he had supposed it would die of its own accord. He hadn't been thinking very clearly at that time anyway.

He turned the pony south-eastward. The breeze blowing a little harder against his shoulders was pleasant and lulling.

After a mile he looked back again. The front of the fire had broadened, apparently to the limits of the pasture. The yellow line was broken in a number of places now. Perhaps it was dying out. No; the breaks were caused by the rise and fall of the prairie; in other places the unseen fire was working up the back side of a rise, at other places it was coming down on the side toward him. The line of fire was not as thin as it had appeared to be before; ragged peaks occasionally shot up from it, probably as it hit stretches of waist-high grass.

There was little likelihood of its spreading farther east or west, Allen concluded, for the cultivated fields and section roads hemmed it on either side.

A jagged finger of lightning thrust down to the mountains, too far away for him to hear the following thunder. A gust of wind struck him.

He was still three miles from town. He nudged the pony to a quicker trot . . .

In a way Dick Robinson would be pleased by the fire, thought Allen. It would prove he had been correct to hammer editorially for the fire-break north of town. Conceivably, this grass fire sweeping unimpeded into the town could have been dangerous.

He was close enough now to separate the bright lights of the honky-tonks from the town proper. Those who considered a street dance too tame were evidently finding it more hilarious to be milked by experts. Well, the days of Goo Goo were numbered.

He walked the pony across the rough furrows of the firebreak. A hundred yards in depth, it ran the breadth of the pasture. Even though

the rising wind should become a gale, no grass fire could ever leap that barrier.

He left the pasture by the No. 2 south gate, a quarter of a mile west of Sawyer's house. Her lighted windows beckoned. He laid the reins against Jigger's neck and the pony wearily turned and carried him toward her house. He unlashed his coat and put it on, and ran his fingers through his hair.

As he drew near, his better judgment—his pride—got the upper hand. Why should he ever again want to see her—or she to see him? He reined away. Instead, he would find Dick and suggest they go out and see the fire meet the firebreak.

The swaying corner street lights he passed under tossed Jigger's shadow; clusters of moths pursued the bright pendulums—"Quite a new experience for *our* moths," thought Allen.

He dismounted in the alley behind Main Street and made his way through the din of firecrackers to the two-block long dancing area. The White Way standards spaced at fifty feet illuminated the dancers, whose feet scuffled on the asphalt to the rhythm of the band. The trolley had just returned from a trip to the end of the line; passengers jammed into it spilled out in high humour to let another load of people take the ride.

Allen assumed that the dance was in full swing; but the wind flapping signs and billowing skirts had warned of an approaching storm, and a number of couples and families were leaving in order to get home ahead of it.

A wreath of grey smoke swirled into the street and swooped among the dancers, "What's burning?" "Smells like grass." "Somebody burning a trash pile."

There was no external diminishing of the gaiety. The band struck into another piece, the trolley clanged off on another trip, the buntinged building fronts threw back the shouts of laughter. If the smell of smoke had stirred instinctive anxiety within the merrymakers individually, no betrayal of it whispered through the noises of revelry.

Allen, making his way through the crowd, told several acquaintances that the smoke came from the pasture's burning. The word spread. A good many people decided it would be fun to see it. They trooped northward on foot or went to their vehicles parked on back streets.

Allen happened to see Dick near the bandstand. When Allen told him of the fire, Dick said, "I was looking for Vera—I promised to dance with her—I'll catch old billy from her—but I've got to see that firebreak do its stuff!"

Riding out double on Jigger, Allen briefly answered Dick's questions about the death of Foster.

"So Foster's dead," said Dick. "Christ! I've got the school ground

story set up, but now—Well, my lad, we really blew the lid . . . What do you think of that lightning? Any chance the rain will drown out that blaze before it gets to the break? Hope not.”

Allen speculated on the play of lightning. “It may be working around to the west. We may not get anything more than this wind. How did it go at the school ground?”

“Oh, you should have seen it! All of them—Carver, Tanner, Gottlieb—they confessed it all. They blamed Foster, but it finally sank in on the people what they’d all been doing. Cries of ‘Lynch ’em’ started popping then, but yours truly stepped in and spoke a few well-chosen words and finally the crowd let them be taken off to jail.”

“Nice going, Dick.”

“Then Pen stepped up and delivered himself of a scathing denunciation, as we journalists say, of the whole town for the way it had treated Sawyer when she was simply the victim of Foster’s criminals. He eulogized her—oh boy, how that redhead can talk when he’s worked up—and yours truly again stepped up and seconded the motion and the first thing you know the crowd was yelling its head off for her—just the way it did at the drawing the day she won the prize. You should have seen it.”

“Yes?”

“Hey,” said Dick, punching Allen in the ribs. “I thought that would make you happy.”

“Oh well, it made her happy, I suppose.”

“No-o-o, not particularly. I said something to her about it, and she seemed in a kind of fog. She said she supposed it was nice but that kind of applause didn’t mean anything—wasn’t real, or not earned—something like that. Maybe the girl’s growing up. But the thing we both missed that I’d have given anything to see was her horsewhipping Foster.”

“Her—*what?*”

“Sure! She went down there ahead of us with a blacksnake whip and walked right up on that platform and let him have it until he turned tail and ran! Pen said it was the goddamdest humiliation he ever saw a woman lay on a man. Hey, slow this beast down—I can’t hang on back here at a trot. And don’t gallop either, for God’s sake—you’re splitting me in two!”

When they arrived at the north end, hundreds of people lining the firebreak were silhouetted against the light of the fire, which was approximately three miles away. Over to the right, the revellers on Goo Goo had trooped out of the district to watch.

Leaving Dick on Jigger, Allen jumped down and ran to Sawyer’s front

porch. He knocked as he opened her door and stepped inside, calling, "Sawyer?"

Almost instantly, she appeared at the head of the stairs. She was wearing the pale blue frock she wore the evening of their first night together.

"Allen?"

He walked under a many-bulbed chandelier, brightly alight for the first time.

She flew down the stairs, paused at the foot, then started to come on; but she could not make herself release the newel post. They gazed questioningly at each other.

"Well . . ." he said.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"Yes."

She turned away. Swiftly, he went to her. "Sawyer! Are you crying? Look at me."

"I can't."

"There's nothing to cry about."

"Isn't there? I've been so afraid—for hours. I kept imagining what might have happened—Oh, what did happen?"

He told her in a sentence. She covered her eyes. "If he had hurt you—"

"Everything's all right now." She shuddered with repressed weeping. "Sawyer," he said with difficulty, "I know I've treated you badly——"

"You've treated *me* badly?"

He took her shoulders and faced her to him. "But in spite of it, will you have me?"

"How could you still want me," she said in despair, "knowing what I planned to do?"

His fingers tightened on her shoulders. "But you didn't do it."

"It wasn't my fault I didn't!"

"What does it matter?" he asked savagely. "You and he . . . you never did!"

"Yes!" she cried. "Mentally I did!—I thought of what it would be like—I expected to——!"

"Shut up, shut up!" he implored harshly. She closed her eyes from the pain of his fingers buried in her flesh. "Stop punishing yourself—and me—with talk like that. Whatever you thought, it was the result of my failing you——"

"No, I failed you."

"Then let's both stop grovelling—and go on from here."

"I don't deserve another chance," she said.

"Oh, I'm sick of hearing about another chance, a second chance, or a third or a fourth! And all of them somewhere beyond the Pyrenees."

Chances are a dime a dozen. If you're stupid you let them all go by. If you're smart you take one to your liking and make something out of it. That's all there is to it. We've both got one right here—one that's life to me—the beginning of life for both of us—and I'm damned if I'll see it kicked away."

Roughly, he clasped her and forced her mouth to his. Not until they had both stopped trembling and were calmer did their lips part. She laid her head against his chest.

"Wouldn't I always be causing you trouble?" she protested.

"I expect so," he agreed, trying to speak with breath that would not come evenly. "I'll resign myself to that. Now—when are we going to be married?"

"Allen," she said, "before I decide that, why don't you let me go away for a while—just for a few weeks—so I can try to get rid of this feeling of being unclean, of being nasty, shoddy——"

"Oh no," said Allen. "You'd probably realise what a sorry husband I'm bound to make and I'd never see you again. Oh Sawyer," he said, "of course we're both tied up in knots. But all we need is a chance to relax, to rest—Suppose we go to bed and just lie side by side, not doing anything, but our arms around each other, touching each other, till we fall asleep. This is an ultimatum: that's the schedule for to-night."

"I couldn't, Allen," she pleaded. "I'd be too ashamed." She lifted her head. "What's all that shouting and noise?"

"The pasture burning off—people watching it."

"Fire?"

He took his arms from around her and smiled. "I'm tired of arguing with such an obstinate woman anyway. Let's go and see it ourselves, and then when everybody's gone home, we'll come back in and—well, decide who's going to have his way."

Outside, the wind struck them. "A norther?" asked Sawyer, holding down her skirt. "Perhaps," he said. "It may go around. There's Dick—let's join him."

A number of men and boys were running about, occasionally stooping over and grabbing with their hands—a sport had sprung up of trying to catch jack rabbits. Scores of them fleeing the fire were running bewildered through the crowd. As the density of the acrid smoke streaming past increased, there was a good deal of coughing and handkerchief holding.

Allen boosted Sawyer into the saddle in front of Dick so that she would have a better view. She sat side-saddle, right knee, under her skirt, hooked over the horn.

At little more than a mile distant, the flames appeared to be exploding and leaping thirty feet from time to time—clumps of taller grasses

bursting all at once. Dick reported to Allen, standing on the ground, that, curiously, patches were bursting into blaze ahead of the main front, and red splotches seemingly hung in the sky over the fire.

"You can begin to hear her roar!" cried Dick.

"Or is that just the wind?" asked Sawyer.

"No! It's the fire. She's going to roar right up to that little ol' break and then snuff! She'll go out like a candle."

Allen, gently rubbing Sawyer's foot as he stood below her, laughed. "Writing your story already?"

"I'm going to write it before I go to bed! Talk about your fireworks! And we can thank Barney Foster for it—his last gesture of good will toward the populace."

Sawyer looked down at him, the expression on her face, lighted by the fire-glow, trying to tell him by its yearning what was in her heart. Dick was looking the other way; quickly, Allen leaned forward and kissed the top of her instep. She tried to draw her foot away, but, gazing up entreatingly, he held it firmly. A smile appeared on her lips, faded to doubt; beseechingly, his fingers tightened on her ankle . . .

A red blob rocketed over their heads and disappeared in the smoke haze behind them.

"What was that?" asked Allen.

"Darned if I know," said Dick. "Clump of grass that got detached, I guess. Look at 'er come—just like an express train!"

But Allen had turned to peer after the fiery ball.

Another soared past. Allen watched it rise on an uplift, and then fall in a red streak into the first block of residences. He looked directly overhead. Several of the luminous objects were sailing at a height of a hundred feet.

A cluster of them lobbed by so close that the pony snorted and backed.

"What in the hell—excuse me, Sawyer—are they?" asked Dick.

A blob fell in Sawyer's yard. Almost at once, the dry Bermuda grass around it caught fire. Allen ran to it and was stamping the burning turf when Sawyer and Dick rode up. They got down and after the incipient fire had been extinguished they stared at the thick glowing disc that had ignited it. Set in a snowy white ash, its wind-fanned red eye glowered at them hotly.

"What is it?" asked Sawyer.

Allen bent over it. "Why—it's a buffalo chip, isn't it, Dick?"

"Sure. That's what it is—dried dung. Like you make campfires with. But why are they flying through the air?"

"They're dry and light as paper. And when they were ignited I suppose the gases in them made them still lighter, and then, scooped up by this wind, they——"

"They're coming over by the dozens!"

"Yes," said Allen. His inflection caused Sawyer to look at him quickly. "This gale is heating them up like a coal under a blacksmith's bellows. And there are tens of thousands of them lying out there."

"Look!" said Sawyer. "A tent on Goo Goo Avenue is on fire."

But before they could look, a commotion broke out in the crowd to the west of them. A herd of Indians' steers, running ahead of the fire, had plunged through the barbed wire fence and run into the spectators. Now, continuing their charge, the hundred or so head made for the town itself, since it lay directly ahead.

Allen swung into the saddle and rode over to the scene. A man and a woman lay outstretched on the ground. Others were holding arms or heads. Allen called to a buggy driver. "Get those two people to a hospital. You folks give a hand to lifting them in. Hurry!"

Allen looked in the direction of the vanished steers. He saw half a dozen pass under a distant street light. "Damn!"

A woman screamed. Her hair flared to a torch by an incandescent piece of dung which had fallen into it, she ran hysterically until she was seized by someone and a coat clamped over her head to put out the blaze.

The crowd retreated nervously. No longer a spectacle to excite cheers, the fire, twisting over the final quarter-mile, seemed to be roaring a threat to devour.

Allen saw a red blob fall to the back roof of Sawyer's house, skid, and hang up. He rode around to the front and shouted to Sawyer and Dick, but so strong had the wind become, he had to approach quite close before they heard him.

"The roof! Draw a bucket of water, Sawyer. There's a ladder in the stable, Dick."

When they placed the ladder against the back of the house, it was too short to reach the roof. Allen cursed; Dick ran back to the stable and emerged pulling Sawyer's carriage by the tongue. They lifted the ladder to the carriage floor and leaned its top against the eaves.

Sawyer brought out a bucketful of water which Dick carried up to Allen, who, having climbed up and made his way across the pitched roof, had kicked the incendiary off. He went back for the bucket Dick held up and doused the flickering shingles.

"How can it set fire to stuff so fast?" shouted Dick.

"Did you ever blow on a piece of tinder?" yelled Allen. "Can you blow fifty-miles-an-hour's worth? Come up here a minute!"

Feet straddling the roof ridge, they looked into the smoke-hazed town. The fiery dung was showering into it. Looking down Plum Street, they could make out running figures and vehicles under the street lights.

"I see fires on six roofs," said Dick.

"I count seven," said Allen.

"And a good many lawns——"

The wail of the fire whistle at the new power-plant—the first time it had ever blown—reached them, and very faintly, the bell of the fire engine making a run in the north end of town.

A buffalo chip fell on the roof and slid to the gutter. Keeping his balance against the gale, Allen went down to it and kicked it off.

"Let's get moving!" shouted Dick, making for the ladder.

When they reached the ground, the frightened crowd was vanishing through the smoke.

"Where's Joe?" Allen asked Sawyer.

"He and F.L. went to the street dance."

The towering grass fire reached the break and then, suddenly, was snuffed. One moment they were standing in its glare; almost in the next, they stood in darkness, with only the stream of sparks nettling their skins.

Still the red blobs hurtled overhead.

"Won't they stop now?" pleaded Sawyer.

Eyes smarting, they peered to the north. Over the winking pasture a fantastic crisscrossing of red chunks soared, dipped, and rushed down the wind.

"They burn out slowly, those chips," said Allen. "If the wind keeps up, this could go on for hours."

"Come on," said Dick. "We've got to go!"

"Where?" said Allen. "I'm going to watch after Sawyer."

Dick seized his arm fiercely. "Listen, big boy. You're our only elected official not in jail. You're top man. You've got a duty. You've got to take charge of this thing!"

"But——"

"Tell him, Sawyer," said Dick.

"Of course you must, Allen. There's no choice."

Allen hesitated. Even from the ground, he could see four fires in the town. He swung up, and Dick got up behind him. "Get buckets of water outside," he called. "Keep circling the house."

She waved.

"God," said Dick as they started off, "let it rain now."

Lightning flashed directly to the west. There would be no rain.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

SAWYER walked around her house for the nineteenth time, her eyes continually on the roof. Lighted patches of smoke whipped over it at a score of points; the first line of houses was silhouetted against the yellowing sky.

Though a number of chips had fallen on her roof, all of them, thus far, had blown off. Each time she waited until the grass where one fell had burned a small circle, then stamped on the flames. Most of the grass of her block, like that of the other blocks in her addition, separated by graded streets, had burned off harmlessly. The skeleton frame of the Ingles' abandoned house, two blocks away, had some time before passed the climax of its destruction.

She circled her house again. Three fires raging on Goo Goo Avenue . . .

A red blob hit her roof, bounced, skidded . . . she watched it . . . and came to rest in the elbow with the south wing.

She ran to the back of the house and tugged and yanked the carriage to the front; on the way, the ladder fell out; she ran for the ladder and dragged it after her. Flame spurted at the roof elbow. She struggled to lift the ladder's base to the carriage floor.

A wisp of smoke streamed out the front door, disintegrating in the direct cross wind. She happened to see it.

She went into the house. The hall was smoke-hazed. The outpouring came from the back parlour. She ran to it.

One window was framed by leaping fire. Apparently a chip sailing through the open window had caught in the blowing curtains. At that moment, a piece of blazing lace dropped to the needlepoint sofa under the window.

Coughing, Sawyer ran out to the front step where she had placed a bucket of water. Carrying it to the back parlour, she threw the bucketful on the burning sofa. A small part of the fire died, the remainder flared. The carpet caught fire. She ran to the kitchen with the empty bucket. She went where the lamp should have been, then remembered: she switched on the hanging bulb. She pumped a bucketful at the sink, but by the time she got back with it, the entire room was ablaze. Wildly, she threw the water through the entrance. It had no effect.

She could not breathe.

She ran to the telephone.

"Operator! Operator!"

"Number, please?" The voice maddeningly calm.

"The fire department. Hurry!"

"That line is busy."

"This is Sawyer Tyndall. My house is on fire!"

"So is this building, ma'am."

Sawyer backed away from the telephone, staring. A wreath of smoke obscured it.

She would have to get help. She would have to go to town for help. In the stable her clumsy haste made the horses uneasy. She tangled the harness.

Somebody was taking the harness from her. "I fix."

"Joe! Where have you been all this time?"

"Sorry. Crap game in a cellar downtown. So we didn't know——"

"The house is on fire, Joe!"

"I see. Big fires all over. Too bad."

"Drive me to town. Hurry!"

A half dozen of the honkytonks were blazing as she and Joe led the team to the carriage. She saw a good many figures running about in the light of those fires, but if they were shouting to one another the wind carried the sounds of it away.

Impulsively, she ran to her front door. The smoke drove her back. Faintly, she saw the stair rail flickering.

Entering Plum Street, she saw that the third house on the right was afire. A number of women and children were passing buckets and pans of water from the house next door and a man was playing a weak stream of water on the burning front porch from a garden hose.

Sawyer looked back. Standing alone, her house was lighted at many windows. Half the roof was afire; even as she looked, a cluster of flaming shingles ripped loose and sailed in pursuit of her.

In the next block another house burned fiercely. There was no one around it. A piece of its roof lifted, moved off; falling, it struck the wall of the house next and dropped to the ground, where the flames licked the wall. A woman carrying a child and a quilt ran out of the house; she saw the starting fire; she screamed a man's name and ran back in.

A black object—a steer—hurtled out of the darkness under her team's noses. They reared and Joe sawed the reins to bring them down. The animal disappeared between the houses.

By the time they reached the downtown section, Sawyer knew it was futile to expect help. There were too many fires. Everybody was engaged in an urgent mission of his own. The traffic was a confusion of colliding vehicles, interlocking wheels, nervous and rearing horses. A steer suddenly pawed its forelegs up on a wagon body. A man ran up, put a revolver to its head, and fired. The beast toppled.

Joe held a tight rein and worked his way erratically.

"It's no use, Joe," she said.

She said it quietly; he had no chance of hearing her in the uproar of men and gale.

He made it into Main Street. The White Way lamps glowed ghostly in the streaming layers of sparks and smoke. A few yards to her left Sawyer saw a group of men on the bandstand. Seated at a table was Allen.

"Wait here, Joe."

She climbed the bandstand stairs. She saw smoke pouring from the upstairs windows of Foley's Drygoods Store opposite. A man's white face appeared over the cornice, looked down, then disappeared.

Stepping over band instruments, Sawyer reached the table. Allen was giving orders to two men who stood before him. Something about speeding the waterworks pumps to their limit.

"What is it, Sawyer?" he asked. "Is your house all right?"

"Yes, it's all right."

The two men ran down the steps. Two more men stepped in front of Allen.

"What can I do, Allen?" she asked.

"Well . . . any one of several things perhaps. Look——" He took a sheaf of papers from a pocket and shuffled hurriedly through them. "I thought I had Dr. Ehrsom's list, too. No, I gave that to someone else. Here is Dr. McHenry's. His bedridden sick. Go around to these addresses and pick up these people. Take their bedclothes. Dr. McHenry probably has already got around to some of them. Carry as many as you can each trip."

"Where shall I take them?"

"The big cottonwood that was killed by lightning. Across the river almost straight south. We've seen it."

"I know where it is."

"It's a white tree you can see in the dark. All the sick are being taken there."

"Is it that bad, Allen?"

"It may get that bad."

She started away.

"Is that Joe in your carriage, Sawyer? Could you drive yourself? I could use him as a messenger."

"Of course, Allen."

"Here." He wrote swiftly on a piece of paper. "Have Joe take this to the city jailer—unlock all cell doors and release his prisoners if the jail goes. Then have Joe come back to me. And Sawyer——"

"Yes, Allen?"

"Don't go down a street or into a house where it looks dangerous."

"I'll be all right."

As she left, she heard Allen ask, "Any of you men have a wagon? All right, you—and you—take it to my father's hardware store. There's a barrel of kerosene out back. Break in and take all the lanterns in stock. Carry them out to that cottonwood tree. They'll need light. Now, sir, I want you to——"

She had never heard his military voice before . . .

She made five trips to the river, carrying a total of twenty-eight sick persons. Going out was easier driving than returning, for on the outgoing trip she moved with the traffic of people abandoning the town. She had no idea how much time the trips required. There were delays. Futile poundings at doors: at a good many of the houses either the doctor or the family had already evacuated the patient. And where there was not actually a fire in the block, there were several times arguments about whether the sick persons should go.

On her fifth arrival at the "hospital" she informed Dr. Smithinson, who had been placed in charge, that she had completed her list. He asked her to circulate among the patients, ascertaining their needs and meeting them as best she could. He lit a lantern for her, though the glare from the town provided sufficient light at that time. The sick, old and young, lay on pallets on the ground, under trees, besides bushes, and for the most part they were silent. But when the burned and injured began to be brought out, their cries tormented the doctors.

"We haven't half enough supplies!" protested Dr. Smithinson. "We need salves, ointments, splints, dressings . . .!"

"The hospitals?" suggested Sawyer.

"We've stripped them."

"Couldn't I get quite a lot at drugstores?" she asked.

"I don't believe anybody could get into the downtown district now. I was told a few minutes ago it is completely afire."

"Well . . ."

She forded the river, mostly dry sand, the narrow, shallow channel bright with the reflection of the conflagration. As she approached the town, there seemed to be only one great, towering fire. When she got into it, though, she found herself going up streets where, from time to time, an entire block had not yet a damaged residence. Traffic, none-the-less, had practically vanished; most of the population had quit the town and taken refuge beyond the river. An instinctive act, this crossing to the farther shore, for, except that the air was filled with sparks and embers, they would have been as safe anywhere south of town—the entire area was in cultivation.

When Sawyer at last reached the virtually deserted Main Street, the flame, heat, and smoke were so intense the horses tried to run away.

She had to stand in the carriage and lean her whole weight back as she sawed on the reins to hold them in. They shied around the burning, deserted bandstand. She passed up The Little Giant Drugstore—its roof had caved. Three blocks up the street, she saw, a store front falling into the street had enveloped the forsaken trolley in flames.

She tried to pull the team to a halt at the next drugstore she came to. The team backed and filled and would not steady. She could never leave them and expect them to stand. Two men came running down the street, and she shouted at them; though they were not more than fifty feet away, they could not hear her, but they saw her difficulty and ran to the horses' heads.

She leaped down, fell to her knees, and scrambled to her feet.

"You ought not to be here!" cried the man swinging to the near bridle. "Everybody's been told to get out. It's a goner!"

She stumbled to the door. She wondered how best to break it down. It gave as she turned the knob. By the light of the flames outside, she saw Jerry Horner standing in the middle of his store, his head bowed. She ran up to him.

"The doctors!" she shouted. "They want medicines for burns, and bandages—splints for bones—gauze and cotton!"

He lifted his head. Tears streamed down his cheeks. He spread his arms helplessly. "Take anything you want," he said.

"Damn you, Jerry Horner!" she yelled. "You get those things! Show me!" He blinked and moved to obey.

They made repeated trips out to the carriage with armloads of medical goods.

"Come with me!" she told him. "You're a druggist—you can help them!"

"I'm going back to my store," he said.

"Damn your store! You get in that carriage!"

He got up and she followed him. She took the reins.

"We can't let them go, Mrs. Tyndall!" shouted one of the men. "They'll run away!"

"Then hold their heads and lead me out of here," she shouted. "Turn 'em around."

They reached a side street and turned south. The way ahead was blocked by a collapsed building. The men started to turn the horses once more, but a building slid into the street behind them.

They accepted the alley on the left and came out on the next street where not more than half the buildings were ablaze, and made their way along it out into the country. She invited the men to jump in; then she let the horses have their heads and gallop to the river.

She did not look back at the town again.

At the next pallet she came to Sawyer knelt and found that the burned child lying on it was dead. She closed its eyes and pulled the blanket over its head. As she had been instructed to do, she tore a page from a notebook and by the light of her lantern wrote "To be identified." She tucked the slip under the blanket.

As she swayed to her feet, she felt a steadying hand on her shoulder. "I'm all right," she said. She held up her lantern. "Allen?"

"Yes."

"Your face is filthy. I'll wash it for you—come with me."

"Never mind. Where's the doctor?"

"Are you hurt?" she asked quickly.

"No. I want to ask him some things."

"Well, wherever you see a lantern it's a doctor or a woman helping him. Here's Dr. Smithinson——"

"What kind of shape are you in here?" Allen asked the approaching doctor.

Dr. Smithinson shook his head. "We can't do half what's needed."

"You'll have a trainload of doctors, nurses, and supplies before noon."

"What? How?"

"Booker, the station agent, spliced in a telegraph key up the track. I've wired appeals for help. A train has already started from Wichita and will pick up more doctors and so forth along the route."

"What about food?"

"I've told every grocer I could find to telegraph his wholesalers to rush carload lots of canned goods and staples. The railroad will expedite shipments. I think we've got everybody out of bed from here to Chicago. Oh, and Booker tells me a regular freight is scheduled to arrive tomorrow. I don't know what's in the cars but we'll appropriate whatever we can use and arrange payment later."

"But we need food now—what about breakfast, Dunbar?"

"Well, I've dispatched fifty men on horseback to ride out to all farms within ten miles and have the families bring in all the food they can give us and try to be here with it before daybreak. It should provide enough for two meals. Later, if necessary, we'll forage further afield. We'll have to set up centres to distribute the food——"

"What about milk? The children——"

"I hadn't thought of that. Reece's Dairy is just a mile back of the river—we'll reserve their milk for the children. One thing I wanted to ask you, do you suppose those beeves we shot in the street will be safe to eat?"

"Of course. Pretty badly burned, I expect, but safe."

"I'll have a detail haul out as many as they can find. Another thing, won't we have a sanitation problem?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Will you act as chief health officer, sir?"

"Gladly."

"Make your own rules."

"How will I enforce them?"

"I've deputised the fifty riders to act as police. They'll enforce any order you ask them to."

"We must get our dead buried."

"How many dead have you so far?"

"Something like sixty," said Dr. Smithinson. "Mrs. Pendleton is keeping count for us."

"We recovered a hundred and five bodies in the town. They're laid out east of the railroad. There may be at least that many more."

"Dr. Smithinson," said Sawyer. "This child is dead. I didn't know her."

The doctor pulled back the blanket. "That's one of the Purdy children—Emma. I removed a bean from her ear just last week."

Sawyer knelt and wrote the name on the slip of paper.

"What do you think we should do?" asked Allen. "Wait until a body is identified by someone, and then bury it?"

"I should think so," said Dr. Smithinson. "I think it would be best to wait until some member of the family has seen it."

"Yes . . ."

"What are you going to about shelter? We've got twenty-five thousand or more people out here—they've got to have shelter."

Allen ran his fingers through his hair. "I'll telegraph the army. They're sure to have a quartermaster's depot somewhere in the Territory. Would five thousand tents be enough?"

"Yes. But we'll need many more cots and blankets than that."

"I think the army will send them."

A woman's feeble cry drew Dr. Smithinson away. Another lantern converged on the cry; it was carried by a woman.

"That's Kit," said Sawyer. "She's been worried about Pen. She's been asking for you."

"I don't want to see her now," said Allen.

"Why?"

"Pen's dead, Sawyer."

"Oh, no!"

"He ran into the ice plant to try and save some company records. It collapsed. He crawled out but died almost at once."

"Poor Pen . . . and Kit."

"Will you tell her?"

"Yes."

"His body is lying with those east of the tracks. Not burned—he in-

haled hot gases. Well—" his mind momentarily halting, as tired brains do, then clearing and resuming its function, "I'll see you later."

He walked off into the darkness.

The wind died away. By dawn the air was still and cool. Daybreak drove away the terror of the night and the people could see; but there were only the river, its trees, the fields, and the milling thousands. Aimlessly, or in uneasy search of relatives, men and women and children wandered about, many of them only half-dressed. Scores lay outstretched in exhausted sleep wherever they happened to have dropped.

Told by Dr. Smithinson to get away a while, Sawyer, too weary to protest, wandered out of the greenery near the river and into a crowded pasture. There, long lines of people had formed to accept the eggs and bread, coffee and bacon which groups of farm wives were parcelling out at certain points. Sawyer saw men and women sitting on the ground and staring blankly at nothing. Occasionally, one would be weeping, but once a knot of men she was passing laughed suddenly, loudly, at a quip uttered by one of their number.

Walking on, simply by putting one foot in front of the other, Sawyer turned back to the river.

"Sawyer!"

Mrs. Dunbar, Fremont, and Tad around a cookfire . . . Mrs. Dunbar standing and calling her.

She went on.

"Sawyer. Oh Sawyer, dear!"

Indifferently, she went to her.

"Have you had anything to eat?" asked Mrs. Dunbar.

"I couldn't eat."

"A cup of coffee at least. A farm woman gave Fremont a quarter pound. We have a fine pot going."

"I couldn't drink it."

"You must." Mrs. Dunbar poured into their cup—the coffee can—and held it out to her.

Sawyer gulped it down . . . black, bitter, and good.

As she drank, she looked at Mrs. Dunbar over the rim. Tired face smeared, a sleeve of her dress gone, one earring missing . . .

"Thank you," said Sawyer. "Mr. Dunbar—where is he?"

"He's off somewhere—he's all right. We all are. Allen—he's over there, I think."

"Thank you." She started on.

"Sawyer, when I've finished feeding the boys, do you know of anywhere I can be useful?"

"Well, the hospital. The doctors need help."

"I'll go there."

Sawyer wandered on.

Not until she saw Allen squatted in the centre of a circle of seated men did she realise why she had walked and kept walking so far. She wanted to be with him.

As she approached, Allen slapped his knees in a gesture of finality, and stood, and the men struggled to their feet and stumbled away.

"Who were they, Allen?"

"A burial detail to dig graves."

"They look too worn out."

"They are. I told them to get a little sleep first. Well, darling . . ."

She shook her head in an effort to clear it. "I can't think."

"There's the sun—Let's climb that little knoll and see——"

They trudged up the white, sandy knoll and looked north across the river. Smoke lifted and hung in the sky above a grey and black rectangle of charred debris. Here and there a wall or a brick shell still stood. They could see figures moving slowly among the ruins.

"It's gone," said Sawyer.

"The buildings are."

"But," she said, so fiercely her voice broke to a croak, "we'll rebuild it. Won't we, Allen?"

His seared lips split to a grin. "Well, that's what people usually do, isn't it?"

"We'll rebuild it," she repeated. "We'll have to. But—" she paused. "But with *what*? What does anybody have?"

"What did we have before?"

She did not reply.

"At Booker's telegraph key up the track," said Allen, "is a line of businessmen and merchants—Dad's waiting in it. They're sending wires to St. Louis, Kansas City, Chicago—ordering new stocks and goods on credit. That's one side of it."

She tried to visualise the new town standing across the river, but her tired mind would not make the picture.

"Allen?"

"Yes?"

"It may be wrong to say this—but I don't feel sorry about it—sorry for my part of the loss, I mean. Do you suppose—can a person be cleansed by fire, so that he—or she——" This time, she would see that *her* part in it—"For myself, this time I'll have more—inside myself—to help build it with than I had before. So much more. I hope I have—I think I have . . ." This time, it would be with Allen, from the beginning. Exultantly, she sucked in a deep breath . . . she wondered if she were falling . . .

Allen's arm was around her waist, holding her close against his side.

"We've got to sleep," he said.

Near the river's edge they found a clump of sumac, so overgrown with wild grape vines the sun's rays could not penetrate. They forced their way deep into it. They lay on the leaves. She snuggled close against his back and threw her left arm over him.

He took her hand and kissed the warm palm.

"Will you be here when I wake up?" he asked drowsily.

"Yes. Always when you wake up."

"You'd better be."

Presently, his breath began falling regularly on her palm. But Sawyer lay awake for a long time.

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